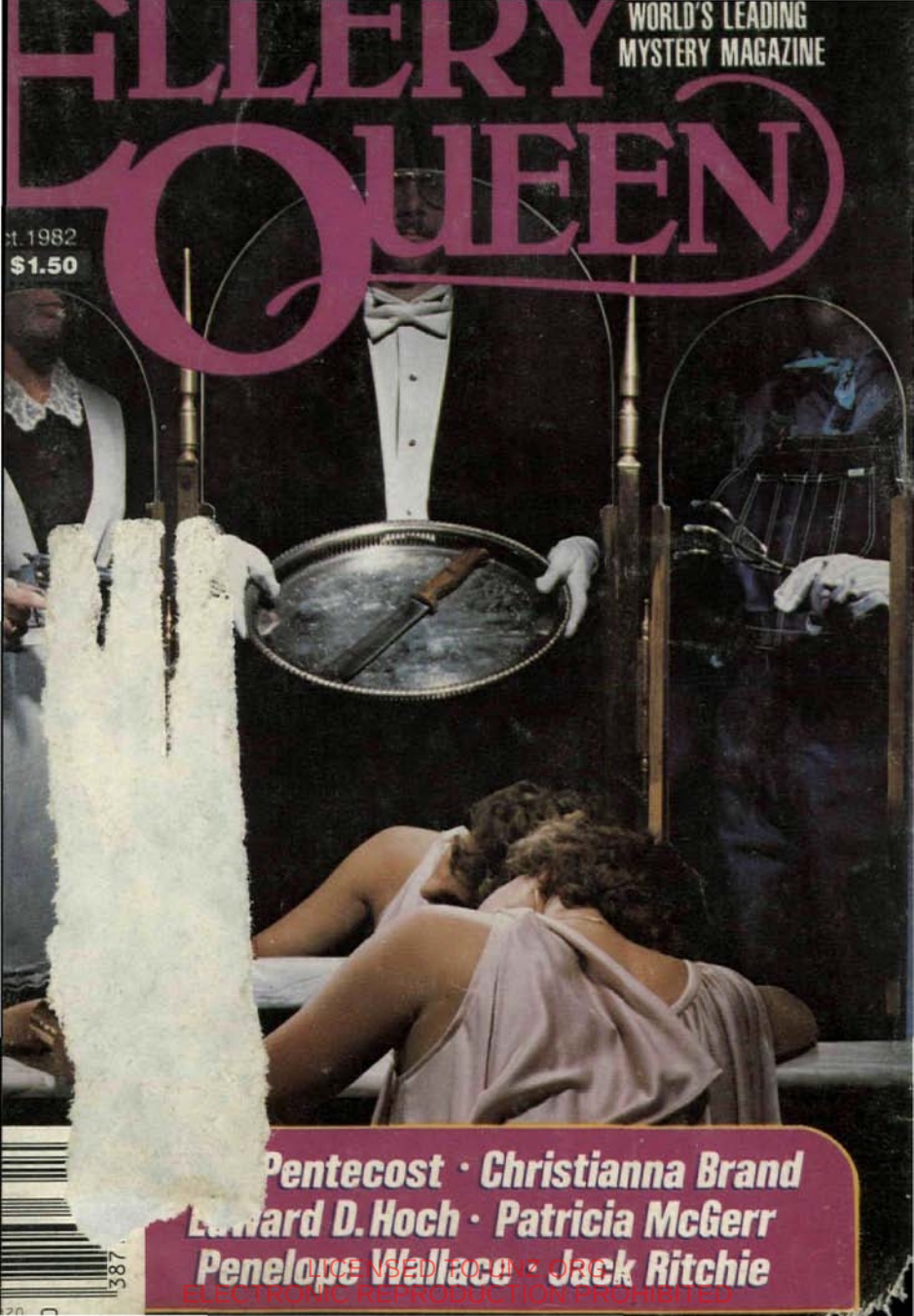

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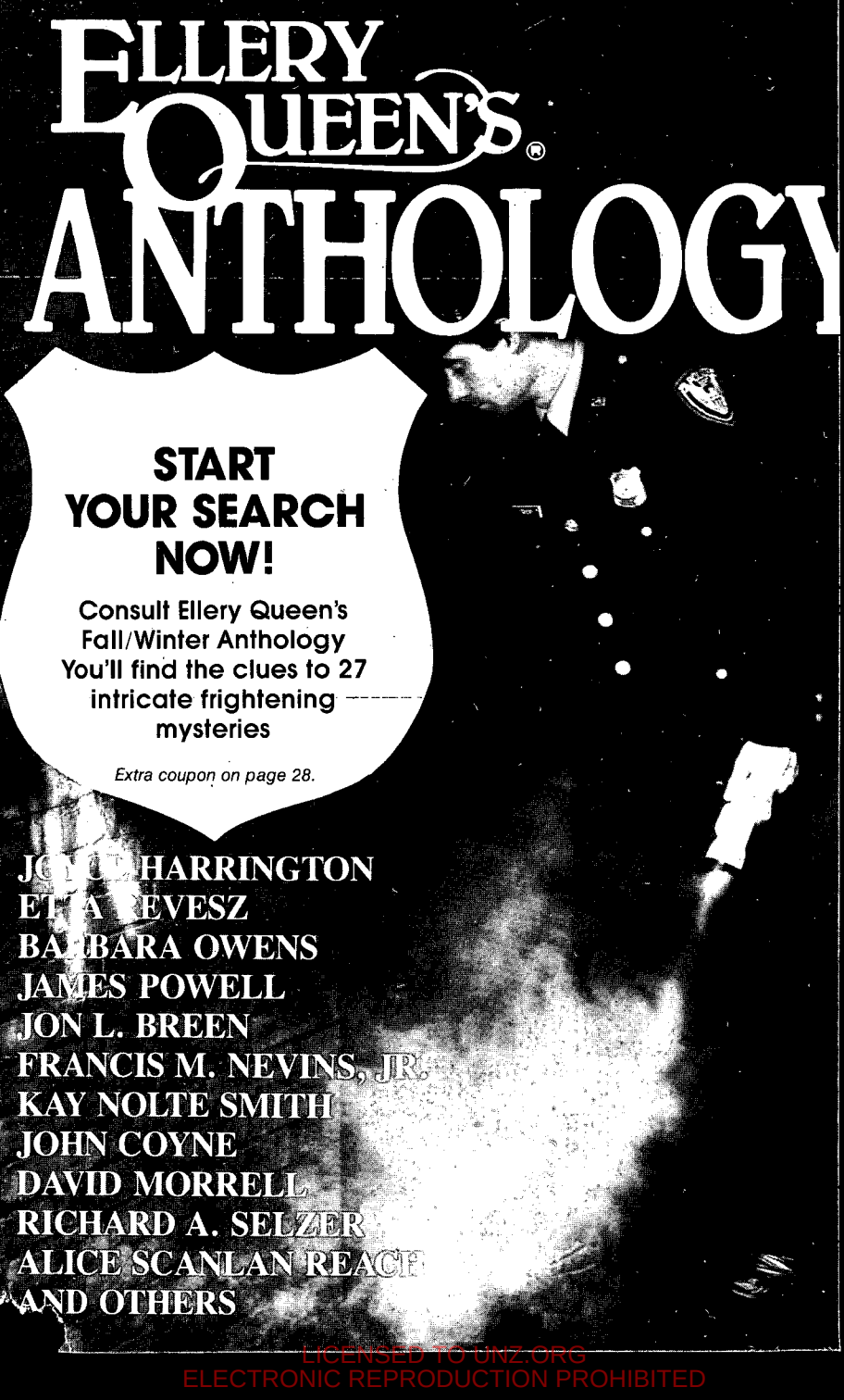

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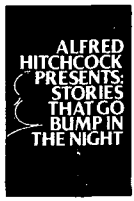


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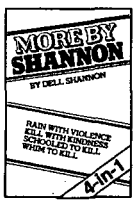


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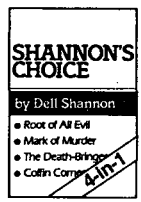


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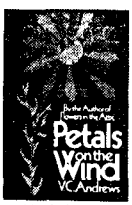


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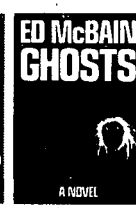


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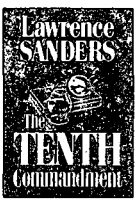


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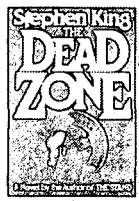


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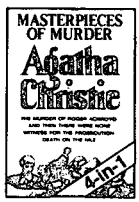


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**a *NEW* Rand story by**

**EDWARD D. HOCH**

*He could get an early start in the morning, Rand told Leila, take a quick look around, and be back by evening. But as it turned out, the situation demanded a longer look.*

*This story is something of a sequel to Edward D. Hoch's "The Spy at the Film Festival" in the June issue. But like all good sequels it stands entirely on its own. . .*

# THE SPY AND THE VILLAGE MURDER

***by EDWARD D. HOCH***

When Rand returned from Sweden to his house in the Englis countryside, he hoped to put the business of Herbert Goos neck's death behind him and worry instead about the summer's lac of rainfall on their little vegetable garden out back. Goosneck, retired contract employee for both British Intelligence and th C.I.A., had been killed by a hit-and-run driver near his cottage o the outskirts of Cambridge. He'd left a list, hidden somewhere, o British and American agents with whom he'd worked. That bothere Rand's old boss, Hastings.

"How was Sweden?" Leila asked, welcoming him home with kiss.

"It rained. *We* should be so lucky." He opened his suitcase on th bed and picked out a crystal bowl he'd brought her as a gift.

"It's lovely!" she exclaimed, giving him another kiss. "Hasting phoned." Her cheek was still against his.

"Oh?"

"He wants you to call him."

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"Tomorrow," Rand said, smiling. He slid the suitcase off the bed.

In the morning Rand dialed the familiar London number of Hastings' private line at British Intelligence. "You did well in Stockholm," the older man began without preliminaries. "But there's still the matter of Goosneck's death two years ago."

"I don't work for you any more," Rand reminded him. "Remember?"

"I need you, Rand. I need this done unofficially."

"Goosneck's killer is probably far away by now, handling a new assignment. What can I do with a two-year-old hit-and-run death?"

"You have a way of getting to the heart of things. If certain parties know you're sniffing around, it might bring them into the open."

"I'm too old to serve as a clay pigeon, Hastings."

"You're still young. You should never have left the service. Have you ever considered doing contract work for us?"

"That's what Goosneck was doing," Rand mused.

"Look into it, will you?" Hastings entreated.

When Rand finished telling her about it, Leila said, "You're going to take it on, aren't you?"

"I told him I'd drive up there and look around. That's all."

"Should I come with you?"

Rand considered it. "I think not. I'll get an early start tomorrow, take a quick look around, and be back here by evening."

"I hope so."

"It's a two-year-old case. There'll be nothing to find after this long."

The village was just a few miles outside Cambridge, a sudden stopping along a country road that sprang into view as he rounded a corner. The few stores and pubs at the crossroads were surrounded by a cluster of small cottages, many of them so old the owners had restored the original thatched roofs. He passed by the vacant cottage of Mrs. Norris, who'd met an unfortunate death in Stockholm the week before, and stopped the car before the next one, where Herbert Goosneck had resided before his death.

It was a small house, with a corrugated metal roof serving in place of thatch. There were colorful flowers in the garden, however, and the place seemed well cared for. It was obviously occupied. Rand got out of his car and strode up the fieldstone walk to the door.

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A young woman wearing a bright-red apron answered the do "Hello," she greeted him. "You don't look like the plumber."

"I'm not," he answered with a smile. "I'm looking for a man nam Herbert Goosneck. This is the last address I have for him."

She brushed the hair back from her forehead. "My name is Fa Hardy. My husband and I live here now. I was expecting t plumber. We've been here nearly two years and the bathroom sin never been right. But—I'm sorry—poor Mr. Goosneck is dead. I was hit by a car."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Rand murmured.

"It was before we came—we never knew him. But some of t regulars at the pub did. What was your business with him?"

"I'm a literary agent," Rand answered smoothly, giving his nam "We once represented Mr. Goosneck and we'd wondered what becan of him. We were never notified of his death."

"Now that's odd, isn't it? Would you like to stop in for some mor ing tea?"

"Thank you no, I must be on my way." He paused. "Tell me—wh you bought the house from his estate, what became of the furnishin and his private papers?"

"An odd thing, that. He had no heirs, no family or close frien at all. No one wanted the contents, so they were to be sold at auctio But it was cancelled at the last minute when someone submitted single bid for everything. I understand the money went to pay some outstanding claims against the estate."

"Who was this person with the single bid, do you know?"

"Rex Wilton, the owner of the local pub, The Holly Dragon."

"You've been a big help, Mrs. Hardy," Rand told her. "I'll go ta to Wilton."

The Holly Dragon was a typical country pub, located at the cros roads with its traditional wooden sign angled to be seen by ca approaching from either direction. Rand parked on the shoulder the road and went in.

It was just before noon and a few of the local people had drift in for a sandwich and beer. The man behind the bar wore fan suspenders with his name running down either one—REX. Rex Wi ton, the owner, no doubt. Rand ordered a pint of lager and stood the bar sipping it.

"Just passing through?" a man in overalls asked him. He need a shave and his breath was foul, even at a distance of two feet.

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"I'm looking for someone," Rand explained vaguely. "Someone who used to live around here."

"Well, I might be able to help you there. Name's Cedric Bushly. I'm the village handyman. Know everybody around here, and everything there is to know."

"Is that so?" Rand gave his name and said, "I'm looking for a man named Herbert Goosneck."

"Ha! You're a little late there, laddy! Been dead these two years. Hit by a car while on his way to this very pub. Rex! This laddy's askin' after Goosneck!"

The owner seemed to pay scant attention. "That so?" He went on making a sandwich for one of the customers.

"I could tell you things about Herbert Goosneck," Bushly bragged. "He used to be a spy, long time ago. Some say that's what got him killed."

"Don't you have an appointment?" Rex Wilton asked, sliding the sandwich plate along the slick bar to a waiting customer.

"That I do," Cedric Bushly agreed, glancing at the clock. "You still be around in an hour, laddy?"

"I might be," Rand confirmed.

"Then I'll be back."

He went hurrying out the door and Wilton said, "Don't listen to any of his gossip. He just wants you to buy him a few pints. He'd invent things all afternoon if you kept the beer flowing."

"But Goosneck was one of your customers," Rand persisted. "I've heard that from several people. He died on his way here."

"Correction. He was struck by a motor car on his way here. He died in hospital some days later."

"I stand corrected," Rand answered with a smile. "Do you have any idea what happened to the furnishings and contents of his house?"

"Well, the government went through his papers. They had people down here for a week after he died. I bought the rest of his things."

"You did?" Rand said, acting surprised.

"He had some nice antique pieces," Wilton explained. "Rather than see them lost in an open auction I offered a single bid for the lot."

"That must have been very expensive."

"Oh, no. It was a small house and he had a bare minimum of possessions. It was as if he always expected to be moving on, you know what I mean?"

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Rand knew. Sometimes, in the days before Leila, he'd felt that way. "What did you do with it all?"

"Kept some pieces, sold some others. It turned out to be a good investment for me."

"Where had Goosneck acquired the antiques?"

"My understanding is he bought them with the house when he first came here. He was divorced, wasn't he?"

"Yes," Rand confirmed. "Years ago."

Wilton hopped on the admission. "Then you knew him?"

"Only slightly. I hadn't heard he was dead."

The pub owner moved away to tend to some new customers. Rand finished his pint and glanced at his watch. Cedric Bushly had said he'd be back in an hour. The wait might be worth it.

Because he didn't want another beer, Rand went outside and strolled around the back of the pub. Here the neatly clipped lawn finally ended at a ragged growth of summer weeds that ran up a gently sloping hill to a wooded area beyond. As he watched, a figure appeared through the trees, a mature woman running a bit to overweight, who nevertheless negotiated the descent with accustomed ease. It was at the bottom, as she stepped from the weeds onto the mowed area, that her attention was distracted by Rand's presence and she turned her ankle under her.

He sprang forward as she seemed about to topple. "Here—let me help you!"

"Thank you, sir," she said with a smile, accepting his hand. Close up, he could see the grey strands in her otherwise coal-black hair. "Are you a visitor here?"

"Only passing through. The name is Rand."

"Sarah Appleby. I work at the pub here, but I'm late today. I was taking a short cut over the hill." She stooped to rub her ankle, wincing with pain.

"Can you walk on it?"

"Oh, sure—I'll be all right. Nothing broken. I guess I'm getting too old for cutting through fields."

"Let me help you to the door."

She accepted his arm and leaned on it for the first few steps. "Is that your car over there?"

"Yes."

"Didn't I see it earlier in front of the Hardy place?"

"You might have," he acknowledged. "I was looking for someone who used to live there."

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"That spy fellow, Goosneck? He's dead, you know."

"I know."

"The Hardys are a nice young couple. We live just down the road from them."

"Did you know Mr. Goosneck?"

"Not well. He kept to himself." She reached the side door of the pub and opened it. "Thanks for your assistance, Mr. Rand, I'm all right now."

He walked back to his car to wait for Bushly's reappearance. But the lunch hour passed without a sign of the handyman. After a time The Holly Dragon closed for the afternoon and he saw Wilton and Sarah Appleby emerge. She got into Wilton's car and Rand assumed she was getting a ride home. He started his own car and drove off in the other direction, without any real destination in mind.

It took him only fifteen minutes to circle the entire village and drive down every street. He saw no sign of Cedric Bushly. Finally he stopped at a little store and looked up the man's address in the phonebook that served the entire Cambridge area. Then he asked directions and was sent to the other end of the village once more. Bushly's house seemed even older than the Goosneck one, and here too a metal roof served instead of thatch. Rand suspected it must be quite noisy in a hard rain.

As he approached the front door, he saw a figure start from behind the house and then jump back quickly—a man, someone he'd never seen before, who'd been startled by Rand's presence. Rand hurried around the back, but saw no one. The man might have made a quick escape through the tall weeds or he might have entered the house through the rear door, which now stood slightly ajar. Rand decided to investigate the house first.

"Hello!" he called in through the doorway. "Are you there, Mr. Bushly? It's Rand, from the pub!" Then, up the few steps on the kitchen landing, he caught sight of a muddy boot. He went up for a closer look, already fearful of what he'd find.

Cedric Bushly was sprawled on his back on the kitchen floor. He'd been shot through the heart at close range and he was dead.

"A terrible thing," Rex Wilton was saying that evening as he drew two more pints and set one on the bar in front of Rand. "I've known Cedric since the first day I came to this village, and a kinder, gentler man I never knew. Oh, he liked to talk, to gossip a bit over a beer, but which of us do not?"

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"I hardly knew him," Rand murmured.

"And yet you were the one to find his body. The ways of fate are strange indeed."

Rand had telephoned Hastings in London before calling the local police, but they'd agreed that he must report the death. Perhaps the killer was only a passing thief, though nothing seemed disturbed in the house. If the killing was a result of Rand's arrival in the village, it meant the killer of Herbert Goosneck might still be in the neighborhood.

"And you know what that means," Hastings said. "It means they don't have the list yet."

"After two years?"

"If they had the list, they wouldn't be waiting around."

"It was probably a burglar," Rand speculated, though he didn't really believe it. The man he'd glimpsed lurking behind the house had seemed too well dressed for house-breaking.

After reporting the crime to the local constable, who'd immediately telephoned Scotland Yard for help, Rand had returned that evening to The Holly Dragon. Rex Wilton was, after all, the man who'd bought up all of Goosneck's furniture. If anyone was searching for the list, it would seem to be Wilton.

"The first murder this village has had in more than twenty years," Wilton was saying to anyone who'd listen. He wasn't counting Herbert Goosneck, Rand decided. That had been an accident, even though the driver didn't stop. "I hate to think of all those Scotland Yard inspectors mucking about."

"Only one," Rand said.

"What?"

"They'll only send one man. Poor Bushly's murder might be big news around here, but it's not a major crime wave."

Sarah Appleby was working behind the bar, tending to the few customers who'd drifted in, and Rand invited Wilton to join him at a back booth. "You want to play some darts?" the proprietor asked, across from him.

"Not my game. I want to talk about Goosneck's furniture."

"You too?"

"There've been others?"

"Bet your life! Right after I bought it I had lots of offers. I told you I sold off some of the pieces at a profit."

"Why'd you buy it in the first place?"

Wilton's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

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"What were you looking for?"

The man's fingers played nervously with his lettered suspenders. "You're some sort of dick, aren't you?"

"No, not really. But I think Bushly was killed because he knew something about Goosneck's accident. I don't want the same thing to happen to you."

"You've got to believe me, Mr. Rand. I don't know a thing."

"Then why did you buy the furniture?"

"It was something old Goosneck said when I went to see him in hospital."

"What was that?"

"He was in and out of a coma those last days and I don't believe he even knew it was me. But he whispered about something valuable hidden in his house. Then he said something about a trap. I don't know if he meant the accident had been a trap or that a trap awaited anyone trying to find this valuable object."

"Did he indicate what it was?"

"No. But I had the impression of diamonds. He wore a nice one on his finger, you know. I asked him about it once and he told me he could have lots more if he wanted them. That's why I thought there were diamonds hidden in his house, possibly in a hollow leg of the furniture."

"But you never found anything?"

"Never. The pieces I sold, I even paid good money to have them X-rayed first, but there was nothing hidden anywhere. I think it was all just a dying man's dream."

"Perhaps," Rand said. "I wonder if I could see the pieces you still have."

"I suppose so," Wilton answered uncertainly. "But you'll have to wait till I close up here."

"Couldn't Sarah handle the customers for a few minutes?"

Wilton thought about it. "All right," he agreed. "It's pretty slow tonight."

He told Sarah Appleby he'd be back shortly and Rand followed him out the door. At the car he turned and asked, "You're sure you're not a dick?"

"I'm sure."

Wilton drove him to a house about a half mile away, a better cottage than the others Rand had seen all day. A grey-haired woman met them at the door and was introduced as Mrs. Wilton. She didn't

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seem very surprised at his arrival. Perha[redacted] used to her husband showing the furniture to prospective b[redacted]

"This desk and chairs, and this sofa." Wilton walked around the living room pointing out various pieces, then led Rand to the dining-room. "I've had them all X-rayed by now. No diamonds or anything else."

Rand grunted, not ready to point out that Herbert Goosneck's treasure was on a sheet or two of paper, immune to the searching eye of an X-ray machine. "They're nice pieces," he commented, "but not exactly what I want."

"They belonged to a spy," Mrs. Wilton said. "Shouldn't that make them more valuable?"

"I suppose that depends upon which side he was on," Rand replied.

"Oh, he was on our side. At least I think he was."

"One can never be too sure."

She peered into his face then, and Rand realized she was somewhat nearsighted. "You're one of them, aren't you? One of those government people. They were absolutely swarming here after poor Mr. Goosneck's accident and they all looked exactly like you."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

Rex Wilton cleared his throat. "Don't pay no attention to Martha. Her eyesight's none too good."

Rand looked over the rest of the furniture, turning over some of the cane chairs to inspect the tags underneath, but he found nothing unusual. Either Goosneck's list had been found long ago or it was so well hidden it might never be found. "Thank you," he said finally. "I've seen all I need to."

Martha Wilton followed them to the door as if she was about to challenge him further, but she said nothing.

They got in the car and drove to the pub. Business had picked up a bit in their absence. Rex Wilton slipped out of his jacket and went back behind the bar to assist Sarah. For the moment Rand was forgotten.

He took the opportunity to telephone Hastings at his home near London, telling him what little he'd learned. "Scotland Yard will have someone there in the morning," Hastings informed him. "If you need help from my department I'll send that too."

"No, the fewer people the better. I've already been spotted as some sort of government sleuth."

"How's that?"

"One woman says I look like the men who were down here when

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Goosneck was killed." As Rand spoke, he happened to glance through the glass door of the phone booth. Sarah Appleby was talking confidentially to a man at the far end of the bar, their heads together in a position of implied intimacy. Rand couldn't be certain, but he looked very much like the man he'd glimpsed behind Cedric Bushly's house. "I'll be in touch," he told Hastings quickly and hung up.

But by the time he reached the bar the man was gone and Sarah was waiting on another customer. Rand motioned Wilton aside and asked, "Who was that man Sarah was just talking with?"

"Didn't notice."

"They had their heads together."

"Maybe it was her husband. He comes in here some nights. Stocky fellow with black curly hair and a bald spot? Around fifty?"

"No, this man was thinner. And still in his thirties, I'd guess."

"Can't help you then."

Sarah pulled off her apron and said to Wilton, "I've got to leave early. Can you handle it alone?"

"Sure, go ahead."

She smiled at Rand and was gone before he could frame the question on his lips. He shrugged and followed her out the door, almost certain she was on her way to meet the slim young man. It might be nothing more than a lovers' rendezvous, but he had to find out.

It was a dark night, with clouds obscuring the moon, and he couldn't be sure if he saw Sarah Appleby walking down the road ahead of him. He followed for a bit, finally deciding it was indeed Sarah. She was heading in the general direction of Herbert Goosneck's old house.

A half minute further along, Rand heard a car on the road behind him and edged over onto the shoulder. Suddenly he remembered that this was the way old Goosneck had died, walking in the opposite direction on this very road.

A trap, Goosneck had told Rex Wilton as he lay dying in a hospital bed.

A trap, baited with care, and Rand had walked right into it!

He hurled himself to the right, into a ditch, as the car swerved to his side of the road and brushed him a glancing blow. He lay in the dark weeds, watching the taillights that slowed and then stopped about a hundred feet away. His arm was doubled under him but it wasn't broken. He stirred slightly, positioning himself for a quick escape if the car should start backing up.

But it didn't. After a moment's hesitation it started again and

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drove off, the taillights finally disappearing around a curve. Rand got slowly to his feet and brushed himself off.

The trap had been sprung and he was still alive.

He heard a movement in the brush and saw a figure approaching through the darkness. "It's Sarah Appleby," a voice called out anxiously. "Are you all right?"

"I think so," he answered. "A few bruises."

She hurried closer, until he could finally see her in the night. "I didn't know he was going to do that! You must believe me! He just asked me to walk down the road because he thought you would follow. He said it was a sort of joke and I believed him."

"Did he ever ask you to do it before? About two years ago?"

Her hand went to her mouth. "You mean Goosneck! I had nothing to do with that!"

"Did he?"

"He wasn't even here then. He came later."

"I know when he came, and who he is," Rand said. "But he's still the man who killed Herbert Goosneck and I want him."

"You're a detective, aren't you?"

"I'm with the government. If you help me I may be able to keep you out of trouble."

"I—"

She stopped speaking suddenly and Rand heard the unmistakable metallic click of a revolver being cocked. "You don't need her help to find me, Rand," a male voice said from close by. "I'm right here."

"So I see. You parked the car around the curve and came back on foot."

"That's right," the man said. Rand could make out his slim silhouette now, standing off to the right.

"Ernie," Sarah pleaded, "put away that gun. You don't want to hurt us."

"Rand saw me at Bushly's house, before he found the body. And you know too much already, Sarah. Sorry."

"You killed Bushly too?" she asked.

"Both of you start walking," Ernie commanded. "I want you away from the road."

Rand turned as commanded, measuring the distance between them. He knew he would be dead within a minute if he didn't act, and he had no intention of going out of this life quite so easily.

He dropped low in the tall grass, hearing the expected shot go

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wild over his head, and then charged as Ernie tried to get off a second bullet in the darkness.

Dawn comes early to the English countryside on these summer mornings, and there was already a glimmer of it in the sky when Rand went back to Herbert Goosneck's old house for the last time. Faye Hardy answered the door as she had the previous morning and Rand was not surprised to see her dressed at such an early hour.

"I'm sorry to be calling so early," he said quietly. "I hope I didn't awaken you."

"My husband didn't come home last night," she told him. "I'm concerned about him."

"That's why I'm here. Could I come in?"

"Certainly."

Rand followed her into the living room. She sat down opposite him, not bothering to offer tea as she had the previous day. "Where is my husband, Mr. Rand?"

"He's assisting the police with their inquiries into the deaths of Herbert Goosneck and Cedric Bushly."

"You mean he's been arrested?"

"Your husband tried to kill me last night, Mrs. Hardy. Not once but twice. I had a bit of a tussle with him in the grass down the road before I finally got the gun away from him. But someone has arrived from Scotland Yard and he's cooperating quite nicely now."

"You mean he's admitted killing Goosneck and that other man?"

Rand noticed her hands were gripping the arms of the chair. "Goosneck, yes—but you killed Cedric Bushly, Mrs. Hardy."

"That's insane!"

"I don't think so. When I found the body, his boots were muddy. I've been thinking about that ever since. It hasn't rained here recently, so what caused the mud? Well, if he was killed elsewhere and transported back to his house by car, and if his boots were wet when his feet were dragged along the ground, they might have gotten muddy. How did his boots get wet? I remembered that he was the village handyman. And I remembered that when I visited here yesterday morning you were waiting for the plumber. You were waiting for Cedric Bushly, weren't you?"

"What if I was? Does that mean I killed him? Why would I kill a man like Bushly?"

"Because he found Herbert Goosneck's hidden list. After two years of your searching every inch of this house, and after Rex Wilton X-

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rayed the furniture looking for diamonds, old Bushly came in to fix your bathroom sink—the one that hadn't been right since you moved in. He unscrewed the trap and got his boots wet and found Goosneck's list in some sort of watertight tube. Goosneck even told Rex Wilton where it was hidden, only Wilton didn't understand him. He only understood there was something valuable hidden here.

"When Goosneck mumbled about a trap it wasn't the one that killed Goosneck and almost killed me, it was the plumbing trap beneath the bathroom sink. Such a trap isn't that uncommon a hiding place, but I suppose you and Ernie never thought of looking there because you knew the list was on paper and paper would be damaged by water."

"You know so much," she said with sarcasm.

"I know that once Bushly fished around in the trap and found that tube you had to shoot him. Then Ernie disposed of the body, dragging it to the car while the dead man's wet boots collected the mud. Are you two really married or was that just a cover story so you could buy the house? The Russians must want that list really badly to set you two up here, arranging to buy Goosneck's house so you could search it at your leisure."

"The list is on its way to them now," she said, dropping all pretense. "You're too late."

"I think not," Rand said. "Ernie tells us you were taking it out of the country today, delivering it in person to be sure you'd be paid."

She started from her chair. "I'll—"

"No, you won't. The house is surrounded. They're only waiting for my signal. I came in first to make sure you wouldn't destroy that list or try to hide it again."

"You think I'd give it to you?" she said, her voice harsh.

"I think so," Rand answered calmly. "Did you know Ernie was fooling around with a barmaid named Sarah Appleby? She's old enough to be your mother."

She threw herself at him then, and Rand had to blow the whistle the man from Scotland Yard had given him.

"Q"

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**a *NEW* short story by**

**CHRISTIANNA BRAND**

**first publication in the United States**

*The Family were a frequent source of disagreement between Mrs. Jennings and her husband, sometimes she thought the original cause of it all. Was it not her complaints about them that had first drawn his attention to her increase in weight, so gradual a process he had hitherto been blind to it? . . .*

# FROM THE BALCONY

***by CHRISTIANNA BRAND***

From the balcony up there they could see right down into her house. And she knew that they talked about her. The old woman sat out on every fine day in her wheelchair, peering down through the railings with nothing else to do but watch.

"I knew it," said the old woman. "There she goes again! Dipping a great hunk of bread into the curry sauce."

"Tasting it," said her daughter with a sneer.

"Gobbling it," said the old woman. "Then she'll sit down to her supper and eat a great dob of it on a mound of rice. No wonder she's fat." She herself, long ailing, was very thin.

"Fat?" said the daughter. "She's disgusting." *She* was not thin but slim. She ate sensibly, carefully keeping herself slim. Her husband loved and admired her for her beautiful figure.

"What can the husband think, married to such a mountain of flesh?"

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Mrs. Jennings was not a mountain of flesh but she was overweight and it was true that her husband found her unlovely in consequence.

"Aren't you having any curry?"

"No, I picked when I was cooking. I must pay for it."

"Well, that makes a change," he said, finishing up her share.

"I thought you'd rather admire me," she said, trying a little joke.

"It's a long time since I did that," he said.

They were out there again next day, the old woman in her chair, the rest popping in and out, waiting on her—the old grandfather, the daughter and her husband, a couple of teenage kids. The Family, Mrs. Jennings called them to herself, with a capital F. They could see everything. They could see into the kitchen, all the front rooms, upstairs and down; even part of the garden at the back of the house. Mrs. Jennings' garden had a tiny swimming pool. "Don't tell me she's going in!" said the boy, coming out with a glass of nice cold milk for Gran'ma. "What'll the displacement be?"

"Flood the garden," said his sister, sniggering.

"That I *would* like to see," said the old woman. "Her in one of them bikinis."

Mrs. Jennings in fact did not venture into the pool. "Those people would have been watching me," she said, excusing herself to her husband when he came home. "Saying things about me."

"Some old trout in a wheel-chair?" he said. "What the hell does she matter?" The Family were a frequent source of disagreement, sometimes she thought the original cause of it all. Was it not her complaints about them that had first drawn his attention to her increase in weight, so gradual a process that he had hitherto been blind to it?

"So you didn't go for a wallow?" he said. "Pity. It might tone up that flab of yours."

"Yes, I know. So I came in and did some hard housework instead."

"Well, she's given that up. Now we'll begin on some housework," said the old woman to her granddaughter, looking down into the drawing room. "You wait—twenty minutes and she'll be on the sofa, gorging biscuits."

It was true that, carrying so much overweight, Mrs. Jennings got easily tired doing housework. But I'm not going to eat anything, she

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said to herself. I know that old hag up there watches everything I touch. She couldn't resist a cup of coffee, however, and an hour later she was still stretched out on the sofa, doing the crossword. "A bit more exercise would do her good," said the old grandfather. "All that money—better for her to be a bit hard up, have to go out to work. *And* on foot," he added, almost savagely.

"And how did you bestir yourself today?" asked Mr. Jennings, sitting down to a well filled dinner plate. He was not such a beauty himself, reflected Mrs. Jennings—not as svelte as all that. "I did a big household shop," she said. Only at the last minute had she succumbed and taken a taxi home. "All by bus," she said, fibbing. "Parcels and the lot."

"I bet," said Mr. Jennings on an unlovely, jeering note.

"Well, nearly all. Oh, and I took your suit to the cleaners. There was a letter in the pocket. I put it on your desk."

He went a shade pale. "Having had a good look at it first?"

"No, I didn't," she said. "I don't read other people's letters."

"All women read other people's letters," he said. "Especially their husbands'."

"Well, I don't and I didn't. Why should I?"

"I simply took the girl out to lunch," he said, defensive.

"The girl? What girl?"

"The girl in the letter. A thin girl," he said.

"Got a girl friend now," the old woman was saying, cozy now indoors in the sitting room. Friends had come in for coffee and the Family were regaling them with the continuing story of That Woman Opposite. "Brought her home the night old Fatso was away—whatever took her away, but she was gone for the night. And in they come, like a couple of rabbits to the burrow, him and this floozie with him. You could follow the lights—lights on in the hall, lights on in the sitting room, lights out in the sitting room, lights on up the stairs, lights on in the bedroom, lights off in the bedroom—"

"What's she like?" asked the grandchildren.

"Thin," said the old woman.

So now she really went to work, dieting hard. It was a weary business all the same, depriving yourself, starving yourself, losing weight, yes, but so gradually that nobody noticed it—never really anything to show. "Well, you're not all that fat," said her doctor.

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"Lose a couple more and you'll be a sylph." A couple more stone h meant.

"I'm eating literally nothing."

"What's nothing?" he said.

"No meals," she said. "But I pick when I'm cooking. I lick th spoon. Well, I can't help it. I've got to cook rich things for my husban and I have to taste while I'm going along, haven't I?"

"Why must you cook rich things for him? Couldn't he manage o something less destructive to *you?*"

"Oh, no—he loves those things. He wants everything cooked i cream. And I've got to give him what he wants."

"I expect it's really because you like licking the spoons," he said laughing.

"Licking the spoons," said the old woman's daughter, leaning ove the balcony rail to look down into the lighted kitchen. "See her Half a pint of double cream that looks like to me—and there she is dipping the spoon in every other minute, licking away. And chocolat sauce, that'll be for the ice cream; hot chocolate sauce, that's he favourite. Some stuff she puts into it, fetches the bottle from th dining room, and then licks great spoonfuls to see she's got it jus right . . ."

"What's this muck?" said Mr. Jennings that night. "It's got far to much kirsch in it. You haven't got it right."

"I'm trying to keep off tasting all the time."

"Yes, well while you're on that lark I'll have my dinners elsewhere," he said.

So there was no more tasting. Sick with knowledge of her ow lack of appeal, Mrs. Jennings accepted his absences, increasingl frequent and prolonged. And since she made no objection, h shrugged and went his way. "He's left her," said the Family, addin pity to contempt. "Well, almost. He keeps up the outward pretense But it won't be long now."

Mr. Jennings kept up the pretense because it suited him to do so The thin lady was keeping up pretenses of her own. But at home h troubled not at all. "If you don't like it," he said, "look in the mirro Just ask yourself, whose fault is it? You're disgusting."

"It's her own fault," said the people opposite . . .

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She began to diet in real earnest. Now that the tasting was over, it wasn't any great hardship. She had spoken the truth when she said that she by no means grossly overate or indeed overate at all—not by standards other than her own. It was simply that with her particular metabolism she more easily put on fat. And with so little cooking to be done for her husband, the weight loss became, if gradual, at least very steady. "I live almost entirely on salads now," she told her doctor.

"If she eats any more of them greens," said the old woman on the balcony, watching her stagger home laden with lettuces, "she'll turn into a rabbit."

"Lashings of salad cream," said the daughter, who never touched anything herself but a dab of malt vinegar. "What'll you bet?"

"But she's losing!"

"Skinny," said the old woman. "Much more of it and she'll be *skinny.*"

"Doesn't suit her," said the husband. "She was better fat."

"She was never all that fat. What's she messing herself about for?"

"Never get him back that way," said the Family, comfortably.

"You were a lot too fat," said Mrs. Jennings' husband on one of his now rare visits home, "and now you're a lot too thin."

"Don't you like me thin?"

"I don't like you at all," he said.

"Oh," she said, shocked. She ventured: "You used to like me once. When I was slim."

"You're not slim now," he said. "You're gaunt."

"She'll take to the drink," said the old grandmother. "You watch!"

She had given up even the six o'clock half glass of sherry. Now, sad and lonely, faced with an evening meal of yet more lettuce, she took to the habit again. A half glass—a whole glass—a couple of glasses: before the evening salad, before the lunchtime salad, at eleven o'clock. "I see they're delivering from the wine shop regular," said the grandfather. "And the hard stuff. Not sherry any more and that derbonny."

"You're not drinking too much?" said her doctor.

"Only what they call 'socially'."

"I'm not too sure it isn't a drop more than that."

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"You've been talking to the people opposite," she said.

"The people opposite?"

"In the flats. They watch me from the balcony there."

"Well, *I* don't know them, do I?" said the doctor. "How could I talk to them?"

"They watch me all the time. Criticize me among themselves."

"How do you know?" he said.

"Well, I'm sure. What else would they watch me for? There's an old lady, an invalid—she sits in her chair and watches me through the railings of the balcony. She's got nothing else to do. And the Family come in and out and they talk about me."

"How do you know they talk about you? You can't hear them."

"What else would they talk about? Hanging over the balcony up there, looking down, watching me. What else has the old woman got to interest her? She talks about me to them and then they all talk about me together. There's nothing I do they don't know about. They've watched me get fat and stay fat. And get thinner and get fat again and now get too thin and stay too thin. I'm so fixated on salad stuffs now, I seem never to eat anything else. I expect they know that too. Everything I do, they see and comment on."

"Maybe they talk kindly?"

"No, they don't. Why should they? They've seen me drive my husband away, making myself so unattractive. They've seen him with his mistress. He brought her to the house once—I smelt her scent on my pillow—"

"Perhaps they criticize *him?"*

"No, they don't," she said. "Why should they?" she said again. "You can't blame him."

But in her heart, she blamed him. She had tried very hard and he had been cruel. She thought to herself with fear that by now she was beginning to hate him.

"Well, well," said the doctor. There seemed nothing else to say. But he did advise: "Go easy on the booze, my dear."

"Alcoholics Anonymous any day now," said the old woman from her wheelchair.

In the doctor's waiting room Mrs. Jennings had leafed through the magazines. "Go out and get a new hairdo," they all advised, as a way to reclaim lost love. "Have a facial, dress yourself up a bit

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glam." She went out and got a new hairdo, had a facial, bought some brightish new clothes.

"What in God's name are you doing to yourself now?" said Mr. Jennings on the next of the rare visits.

She had had a little drinkie and now she embarked upon another of her humble jokes. "I read in a magazine that the way to get back my husband's love was to make myself look glamorous."

"Well, you've made yourself look a freak," he said.

More than one little drinkie, actually—several little drinkies. She tottered up to her feet, took the decanter by its stout glass neck, and lifted it above her head. He gave her one look of stunned amazement and, as the bottle hit him, stepped back and fell, grazing his temple on the hard edge of the marble mantelpiece.

She put back the decanter slowly on its tray and knelt down beside him. After a little while she realized that he was dead.

Wonderful how it sobered you up. One minute you were half tight, reeling, stupefied, boiling with the pain and indignation of the ultimate insult, and all of a sudden you were cool again, cold again, aware and very much afraid. But thinking, quickly. I hardly touched him. Well, yes, I hit him—but he scraped his head on the mantelpiece as he fell. He'd had a few drinks before he came home, we were just talking, he slipped and fell backwards, he banged his poor head. I didn't hit him, I didn't touch him, it's nothing to do with *me*.

And she picked up the decanter and wiped from its neck any grip marks that might be there, handling it as though it had been used merely for pouring out whiskies, and put it back on its tray. And knelt down again—and touched with her finger the blood oozing from his head wound, and tweaked out a gray hair. And stood up and smeared her finger against the edge of the mantelpiece, holding the hair against it so that it stuck there. It was horrid, doing it, but she knew, as she had known at the doctor's with a flash of insight, that in fact she no longer loved him, wouldn't really have wanted him back. To touch him did not terribly upset her.

It will be nicer without him, she thought. I can move away where I won't be looked down on or be talked about by those horrible people out on the balcony.

Out on the balcony! On this sunshiny evening they would be out on the balcony, leaning over, peering into her window: seeing it all!

"He's fell over," said the old woman. "He's lying there. She's—what's she doing now?"

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"Leaning over him," said the daughter. "He's dead, she can see he's dead. She's killed him."

"Hit him with that there glass bottle," said the daughter's husband. "What's she up to now?"

"Wiping the neck of it," said the granddaughter.

"Covering up her traces," said the grandson eagerly.

"Kneeling down again. She's— Well, I never!" said the daughter. "What's all this for?"

"Blood on the mantelpiece. She's going to pretend he hit his head there. Going to pretend he was drinking and fell over. Just slipped and fell, she never hit him, it's nothing to do with *her*. I'll tell you what," said the old grandfather slowly, "I think we should inform the police—"

Mrs. Jennings stood listening. She could almost hear them now, she knew so well what they would be saying. After a little while, she went to the telephone. "Police? Would you come round?" She gave her address. "I think I've just killed my husband. He's lying here dead." She replaced the receiver and went and stood at the window, looking up at them. "I don't know why I said 'I think'," she said, "you'll tell them anyway."

"Police?" the daughter's husband was saying. "You'd better come round. We've just seen a murder committed."

"Yes, it was I who phoned you," said Mrs. Jennings when the police arrived. "But you've had another call, from the people opposite. Up there, in the balcony flat. They watch me," she said. "Everything I do, they know all about me!" She glanced down her fleshless frame in the too-smart new clothes at the dead body on the floor. "Everything," she said. "They spy on me, they criticize. I never get away from them. They've ruined my life. If it hadn't been for them I don't think this would have happened."

The officer made a sign to his sergeant and knelt down beside the body, glanced up at the mantelpiece, at a grey hair on the edge of it and a smear of blood. "Did he fall against this?" he suggested, standing up, easing his cramped back. "Step back, trip over the mat, something like that? Hit his head as he went down?"

"Do you mean—an accident?" she said.

"Well, that's the way it looks. Is there something," he asked, made very curious by the tone of her voice, "that you'd like to tell me?"

"They'll tell you anyway. The people opposite. It wasn't an acci-

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dent. I picked up the decanter and hit him with it. He insulted me. Just once too often. He insulted me."

"You hit him?"

"With the decanter. He dodged back, trying to avoid it, and then he fell and hit his head, but only a little bit, against the mantelpiece. But I hit him first."

"You mean, to—"

"Oh, yes, to kill him. I might as well admit it," she repeated, "they'll tell you anyway."

"The people opposite?"

"They'll have been watching. They're always watching. The old woman in her wheelchair—what else has she got to do? And the Family. Always talking about me. Can't you hear them," said Mrs. Jennings, "talking about me?"

"Who was she telephoning?" said the old woman.

"Police most likely. She knew we'd tell anyway."

"It began with her putting on all that weight," said the daughter.

"It began with me putting on weight," said Mrs. Jennings. "That's what they're saying. Can't you hear them? 'She knew we'd tell anyway,' they're saying. Always watching me, always talking about me. But for them, I could have pretended this was an accident, I might have gotten away with it. But they wouldn't have that. Better ring the police, they said. It was the daughter's husband rang you, I heard him. We've just seen a murder committed, he said—I heard him. I hear them all the time. They watch me and talk about me. Can't *you* hear them? Listen!"

"They've stopped now," said the policeman.

"No, they haven't—they're chattering on, chattering on—"

A policewoman had arrived and now put an arm lightly about her shoulders.

"Where is she taking me?"

"Where you won't hear them talking. You don't have to worry, love—you won't have them watching any more."

"They'll watch you taking me."

"No, no—they've all gone inside. There's no one on the balcony now."

"You can't hear them talking? They'll still be talking."

"Well, now you mention it, I think I can," he said. "But nicely. Sorry to see you go, they're saying. Such a nice lady, really, they never meant anything against you; be sorry to see you go—" Tend-

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erly clucking, he urged her gently towards the door, the woman's arm still about her shoulders. But when she was gone, he said to his sergeant, "No family?"

The sergeant shook his head. "Single-room bed-sits, sir. One elderly lady on that floor, lives alone. Neighbor calls in, wheels her out onto the balcony with a thermos flash and some sandwiches for the day."

"No one else calls?"

"No one, sir. No friends, nobody. Sad for her, poor old girl," said the sergeant. "She's blind."

"Q"

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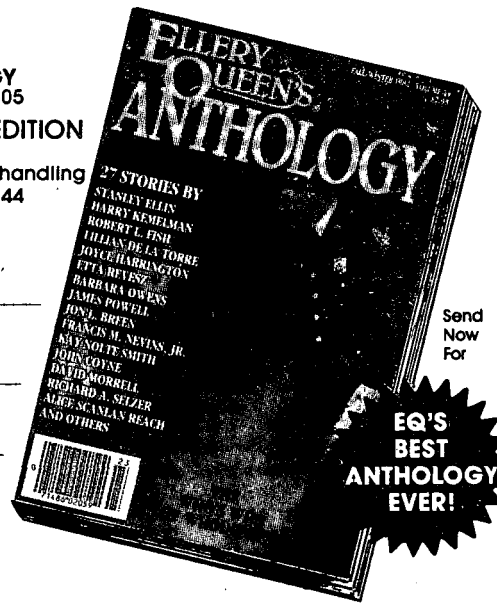


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*Pauline, Lang knew, wouldn't have come back after having been escorted out of town just to say hello or gush over old times . . . Our continuing thanks to Mr. Eckels for this clever and entertaining series about Lovell and Lang—L and L Galleries, Fine Art and Paintings—and its endearing and enduring message of caveat emptor . . .*

# THE CANADIAN CAPER

***by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS***

The girl who manned the reception desk in the front showroom had said that a customer had asked for me personally. But of course the slim blonde I found gazing raptly at a medium good watercolor was no customer. She still wore her hair at shoulder length to emphasize the little-girl innocence of her soft round face and wide-spaced blue eyes, but the smile she gave me—as far as I could tell anyway—was genuinely happy.

"Hello, Pauline," I said.

"Harry!" Pauline Morgan said. "How long as it been? Five years? Six?"

"Closer to eight," I said.

"That's right. Not since that thing with the three panels. What was it you called it?"

"A triptych."

"Of course. And what do you suppose that terrible little man you sold it to did when he came back and found I was gone?"

"Took his loss like the gentleman he was, I suppose," I said. "I never went back to find out."

"Nor did I." She put her hands on my shoulders and studied me

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appraisingly. "My, but you look good, Harry. And to think I wouldn't even have known you were in town if it wasn't for that awful detective, what's his name?"

"Peterson," I said.

"That's right. Why can I never remember that? Anyway, I had this little misunderstanding in Cleveland and someone must have wired ahead, because when I got off the bus he was waiting for me. Of course, it was all straightened out in next to no time, but at one point he practically accused me of coming over here just to pull something off with you." She paused and looked at me earnestly. "That man doesn't like you, Harry," she said.

"So naturally," I said, "the first thing you did when you got free was head straight here."

"Oh, *please,*" Pauline said. "Give me some credit. That was three days ago and nobody would follow little old me for three days—not without my knowing it anyway. Besides, the last time he saw me I was on a bus headed for St. Louis and points south."

"Put you on it, did he?"

She nodded ruefully.

"But of course you got off at the first stop and came back. Why, Pauline? What is it you want from me?"

She smiled brightly. "Lunch," she said. "For a start."

I took her to a small Italian place down the street. It was a little early for the usual lunch-hour rush, so we had no trouble finding a corner booth that promised a maximum of privacy.

"I just can't get over how well you're doing," Pauline said after the waitress had taken our order and gone off. "Your own gallery even." Her wide-set eyes reflected admiration. "Still working partners with Lovell?"

I nodded. Lovell is, of course, the key element in our partnership—although I'm not sure he realizes it or that it would matter to him if he did. Lovell is an artist in the real sense of the word, although his talent is limited to forging paintings of any style, period, or artist to a degree of perfection that only the most detailed scientific examination can distinguish from the original artist's work, and the technical end—the actual painting and associated craftsmanship—is all he cares about. Which leaves me free to concentrate on what I do best, which, of course, is disposing of the paintings to our mutual profit.

It was in the course of one of these transactions that we'd previ-

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ously run into Pauline. A less than scrupulous art dealer had contracted for us to forge the missing third panel to a triptych that a not-too-bright client of his was desperate to buy. The whole thing was a set-up, of course. The not-too-bright client was Pauline and as soon as we had our money the three of us had split to go our separate ways. Until now, that is. And Pauline, I knew, wouldn't have come back after having been escorted out of town just to say hello or gush over old times.

"You were going to tell me what else you wanted," I said.

"Same old Harry," Pauline said. "Always business. But yes, I was." She looked at me earnestly. "Have you ever been in Toronto, Harry?"

"Not that I recall."

"Beautiful city," she said. "But cold. It helps if you like snow. But anyway I was there about a year ago. Sheila Tynan and I were working a modified version of the old magic wallet trick and doing very well at it until Sheila met this dreamboat with a farm with ninety-nine oil wells or uranium mines or something on it. In any case, the combination was too much to resist. So while Sheila went off west to live a life of unearned ease, I was left with nothing to do but look around for something to tide me over until I could find a new partner. It wasn't easy, Harry, but finally I ended up taking a job with a man named Oliver Wendell Horton. Ever hear of him?"

I shook my head. "I don't think so."

"Dominion Development? Northwest Territories Unlimited?"

I continued to shake my head. "No. What is it? Real estate?"

"Hardly," Pauline said. "Oliver Wendell is a corporate promoter or a manufacturer's representative or foreign sales rep or whatever else the fancy strikes him to call it. What he does—or promises to do—is represent U.S. firms that want to expand into the Canadian market."

She smiled ruefully. "You'd be surprised at how many there are. Small companies mostly that want to get bigger but don't have the organization or distribution setup to go up against the big boys in the U.S. So when Oliver Wendell comes in with his talk of the vast undeveloped potential of our neighbor to the north they jump in with both feet, sure this is the ground-floor, low-competition area they've been looking for all their lives.

"Anyway, if Oliver Wendell thinks the company is promising enough—and he particularly likes specialty bakers and convenience-food processors—he'll contract to push its products in Canada in return for a percentage of the net he brings in. Then after a rea-

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sonable period of time he'll write back with the good news: one of Canada's largest chains is ecstatic about the product and wants to pilot it in its Toronto outlets. How soon can the company fill the order?

"How soon? You guess, Harry. Will yesterday be all right? Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the company will break its collective backs getting the order out. You can guess what happens next."

"There's a snag," I said.

"Give the man a dollar," Pauline said. "As soon as the shipment hits the border, customs impounds it and Oliver Wendell wires down that they won't release it until the duties are paid. Of course, this is all news to the company because usually they've never done any international shipping before and Oliver sure as hell never mentioned anything about it. But anyway suddenly, there they are, faced with a bill that can run as high as a couple of thousand dollars. Of course, that's only a fraction of what they stand to make if the deal goes through—or lose if it falls flat. So almost invariably they panic—particularly the food people who can just *see* the whole shipment going stale or spoiling—and send the money off by return wire."

"To Oliver, I assume."

"Another dollar," Pauline said.

"And equally naturally," I said, "that's the last they ever hear from him."

"Not always," Pauline said. "Sometimes if Oliver thinks the traffic will bear it, there may be an additional delay or expense or two—but basically that's it."

"How did you fit in?"

"I was Oliver's secretary. I sent out the letters and wires, answered the phone, stalled clients when he was 'in conference'. It wasn't that I didn't know what I was getting into. Even if Oliver Wendell hadn't been upfront about it, you get so after a while that you can smell a scam a mile off. And I was upfront with him too. What irks, Harry, is that even after all that, he stiffed me.

"It was all boom or bust, he said. Once the money started coming in, everything would be fine, but until then all he could afford to pay was pocket money—he'd have to owe me the rest."

"Oh, Pauline!" I said.

"I know," she said, "I should have smelled it. But what else was I to do? Besides, I was handling the books and all the mail, wasn't I? I'd *know* when the money arrived. And sure enough, as soon as

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it did he wrote me a check for the full amount. The only thing he asked was that I wait a couple of days for the sucker's check to clear before cashing it."

"And did you?"

"Of course not. As soon as it was my lunch hour I practically ran to the bank."

"Only to find he'd beaten you and already closed out the account."

"Worse. He'd never even had one. The check was solid rubber through and through. And of course when I got back to the office, he was gone.

"He'd overlooked one thing, though, and that's that when you're in the business yourself it's not too hard if you put your mind to it to track somebody who sticks to the same line of work. And Oliver Wendell's too old to change. He's here in the city right now, recruiting business for his next go-round.

"And that's the real reason I came here from Cleveland. He owes me, Harry. And I want it."

"Good luck," I said.

"You better wish yourself that, Harry," Pauline said. "I had mine when I ran into Peterson and he told me about you. Because I knew that if anybody could get that money back for me it would be you. No, don't shake your head, you're going to do it—because if you don't, I'll hate myself but I'll just have to tell that nice Sergeant Peterson all about that triptych deal."

"I see," I said. I nodded thoughtfully. "All right, Pauline," I said finally, "hate yourself. Tell him."

"What?"

"Tell Peterson," I said. "I don't care. Neither will he, because it wasn't his jurisdiction—and even if it was he still couldn't prosecute. It's been eight years, remember? The statute runs out in seven."

"You mean you aren't going to help me?"

"That's exactly what I mean," I said. "Vengeance I leave to the Lord, if for no other reason than because it butters no parsnips."

"You rat."

I shrugged. "Rats have a bad name," I said, "but they've managed to survive for a long time."

"So have cockroaches."

"I see we understand each other," I said. "On the other hand, I might have a use for Horton. You put me in touch with him and, who knows, there just might be something in it for you too?"

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"I expected better of you, Harry," she said reproachfully. But she gave me the address anyway.

There was somebody in with Horton when I arrived for my interview at the hotel suite he'd rented. The girl he'd hired to handle the phone was apologetic. "Gee," she said, "I'm sorry, but when you called I thought sure he'd be free by now. If you like, I can give you another appointment later."

"How long do these interviews usually last?"

The girl shrugged. "It varies," she said. "He allows an hour and a half, but some of them are like, you know, over in less than twenty minutes. So it kind of evens out."

She was eighteen and a gum chewer, and I wondered briefly whether Horton planned to stiff her the way he had Pauline. He probably didn't, I decided, because it would be foolish to risk any repercussions at this end that could queer the whole deal. It was only after the money had come in and he was ready to run anyway that squawks didn't matter.

In any case, I told her I'd wait and sat down. Fifteen minutes later, Horton finished his interview and it was my turn.

He was an older man than I'd expected, mid-sixtyish at the least, with a pale bony face, a hawklike high-bridged nose, and the quick fluttery gestures of a nervous sparrow.

"L and L Galleries," he said, studying the business card I'd given him. "Fine Art and Paintings. Oh, dear, not my usual line at all. On the other hand, there's nothing, I always say, that aggressive merchandising can't sell. In fact, I believe Sears tried just such a scheme with art works several years back. I'm not quite sure how that worked out, but what's to say it isn't an idea whose time has come—particularly in an untapped market area that's crying for culture?"

"What indeed?" I said. "But before we go any further, there are a couple of things I should make clear. One is that original works of art, including paintings, are not generally subject to customs duties."

"Ah," Horton said carefully, and I had the distinct feeling he was deciding this was going to be one of those interviews that evened the schedule out and was just trying to think of a way to break it to me more or less gently. To forestall him I added: "The other is that it was a mutual acquaintance who recommended you to me." His eyebrows went up questioningly. "Pauline Morgan."

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"Oh, dear," Horton said. He looked at me apprehensively. "You aren't a violent person, are you, Mr. Lang?"

"Not at all," I said.

Horton looked relieved. "Nor am I," he said. "I trust then that we can discuss this in a civilized manner. It was really, as you might imagine, a most unfortunate situation, and I'm sure Pauline has told you some terrible things about me. But let me assure you, Mr. Lang, that they are simply not true. Simply not true at all."

"That's too bad."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said it's too bad they're not true—because, frankly, Mr. Horton, it was those terrible things that interested me in you."

"I see," Horton said. He sat back and regarded me carefully again. This time the look was calculating, and while he still had the same fluttery mannerisms they seemed just that now—mannerisms. "What is it you want from me?" he said.

For answer I passed over a large folded sheet of paper. Horton looked at it curiously. "What's this?"

"A hot sheet," I said. "Otherwise known as an Interpol Bulletin. It's a list of the twelve most wanted stolen or missing works of art. The one I'd like to call your particular attention to is number eleven, Eilmeyer's *Girl with Bouquet.*"

"I see it. What about it?"

"I have it," I said. "At the gallery." I smiled wryly. "It's what you might call another 'unfortunate situation.' I had a client who wanted the painting and wasn't too particular about how he got it. So I made a deal with a servant of one of the owners. We'd bring the painting here while the owner was on extended vacation so my partner could copy it, then return the copy and sell the original. Unless the original owner submitted the copy for scientific examination—which wasn't likely—he'd never know the difference and everybody would be happy. What we couldn't foresee was that the owner would break his leg skiing and come back early—before we could get the copy in place.

"Fortunately, his man was able to convince him there must have been a break-in while the house was untenanted and that the painting was stolen then. That took him off the hook, but it does nothing to solve *my* problem."

"I don't see where you have a problem," Horton said. "Not if your client really doesn't care how he obtains the painting."

"Oh, he doesn't," I said. "In fact, he wants it worse than ever and

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is willing to pay even more now. These real nut collectors are like that. I don't dare sell to him, though, because with all the publicity if that painting ever surfaces again it's bound to be recognized and the trail will lead straight back to me. My best bet would be to burn the painting and be done with it, but that's too much like burning money and I can't bring myself to do it."

Horton nodded sympathetically. Burning money was something I imagined he would find difficult to do himself.

"Which leaves me with the next best," I said, "which is to get it out of the country and sell it someplace where it isn't quite so hot. That's where you come in. I'll pay you a thousand dollars to smuggle it into Canada for me."

"Oh, dear," Horton said. "That's hardly my line of work, Mr. Lang."

"I realize that," I said, "but I'm not looking for a professional smuggler. The painting's small and light and fits very neatly behind a false side in a suitcase I've already set up. All you have to do is pack your clothes in it and carry it across the border. I'd do it myself except that as a known art dealer I automatically fall in the area of suspicion, and if I start going back and forth into another country for no apparent reason people are going to start asking questions.

"You, on the other hand, have no known connection with the art world. You're simply a Canadian citizen returning to your own country after a legitimate—" I smiled "—or at least apparently legitimate visit to this one. Nobody will think a thing. And once you're in Canada, I'll take over again. So you're clear on that end too."

"There still would be an element of risk."

"Of course," I said. I knew what he was thinking. As long as he kept his victims on one side of the border and himself on the other, he was practically untouchable. But a hassle with the Canadian customs authorities on his own turf would be another matter altogether. "That's why I'm offering a thousand. But, look, if you're worried, do this: come down to the gallery tomorrow to check out the suitcase and decide for yourself whether it's worth it to you or not. To make it worth your while, I'll pay you a hundred just for showing up. If you decide to go along, it'll be an advance on the thousand. If you don't, it's still yours to keep. Fair enough?"

Horton looked at me thoughtfully. "There must be a lot of money involved."

"That's not your concern," I said. "Nor is what happens to the painting after it's in Canada. I'll take over from there again."

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"I see." Horton smiled briefly. "Well, I don't see where it would hurt me to look at it. Would noon be all right?"

I told him noon would be fine. We shook on it and I left.

Outside, the girl gave me a sad smile. I had been one of the shorter interviews, after all. I winked at her, which didn't tell her anything except maybe that sometimes it wasn't really the length of an interview that mattered.

There were two people with me in my office when Horton arrived the following day. One was Lovell. The other was a short, stocky man in his mid-fifties who kept an unlighted cigar clamped aggressively in one corner of his mouth as if to tell the world he wasn't about to take any nonsense from anyone. After another ten minutes I told him I couldn't keep Horton waiting any longer and escorted him out through the front office, where Horton was sitting looking aggrieved.

The stocky man didn't bother to spare him a glance. "I'll go another five thousand," he said to me. "That's top dollar. You won't do half that good anyplace else."

"It's not a question of money, Mr. Carrdock," I said.

"It's always a question of money," he said. "You think about it. I'll be at the Sheraton this afternoon from three on. You can get in touch with me there when you change your mind."

"I won't," I said.

He smiled faintly, shifting the cigar. "You think about it anyway," he said and left.

Horton frowned after him. "Who was that?"

"Just a customer," I told him. "Nobody you need worry about."

"If you say so," Horton said, but he continued to look back over his shoulder as I took him into my office.

Lovell was still standing where I'd left him. I introduced him to Horton, then got a medium-sized suitcase from its niche and placed it on my desk. Horton looked at it curiously but made no move toward it.

"There was to be a payment," he said, "for my time."

"So there was," I agreed. I got $100 from the safe and counted it out for him. Lovell frowned and shifted his weight from foot to foot. Horton didn't appear to notice. Smiling his satisfaction, he put the money away and bent to examine the suitcase. Several minutes later he looked back up.

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"The interior dimensions seem to be the same on both sides," he said.

"Of course they do," I said. "I told you it wasn't an amateur job. And filled with clothes it'll look even more natural. But the painting's there all right. Look."

I undid the concealed clips and lifted out the false panel to reveal the painting fitted neatly underneath. Horton looked at it appraisingly. "How much is it worth?" he said.

I shrugged. "Like most things," I said, "whatever you can get somebody to pay for it."

"And that would depend on who you were selling to," he said, "and where." He bit his lip thoughtfully. "A thousand isn't enough," he said. "Make it five thousand and you've got a deal."

Lovell frowned. "I told you he'd try to hold us up," he said. "We could get a professional smuggler for half that."

"But you don't want a professional smuggler," Horton said. "You said so yourself. You want me. Someone above suspicion, you said. I won't be greedy, though. I'll settle for the twenty-five hundred—plus, of course, a bill of sale."

"A what?"

"A bill of sale," Horton said, "*and* an affidavit stating that the picture is yours to sell and that you obtained it by legitimate means." He smiled. "Just a little added insurance. As you so correctly point out, I have no known connection with the art world, and with a receipt if customs do catch me I can reasonably claim not to have known there was no duty. I'm sure they'd be considerably more lenient with someone trying to beat a nonexistent tax even if—to his great consternation—the object was later discovered to have been stolen."

"Covering all bases, are you?" I said.

Horton nodded smugly. "I find it's generally a good policy."

"That cuts two ways," Lovell said. "I don't like this, Harry. He gets everything while we take all the risks. How do we know we can trust him? He might try to pull the same kind of stunt on us as he did on Pauline."

"That's ridiculous," Horton said. "Even if I was tempted, how could I betray you without contacts or information as to who would buy? A stolen painting's hardly the kind of thing you can hawk on a street corner. Or would you suggest I put an ad in the papers? I'm hardly that foolish."

"You could turn it in for the reward."

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Horton sniffed. "I wasn't aware there might be one. Even so, the ;ime to have decided you couldn't trust me was before you started."

"He's right," I said. "He knows enough to blow the whistle any ;ime he wants."

"Not that I would, of course," Horton said. "But it does appear you ıave no real alternative but to go ahead as planned."

"Maybe not," I said. "But Lovell's right, covering all bases does ;ut both ways. And so I think we're entitled to a little insurance too. So here's the deal. You get your bill of sale and affidavit. In return ;ou put up an amount equal to the reward as a guarantee the temp-;ation to cash in won't turn out to be too great."

"And how much would that be?"

"Ten percent of the painting's value," I said. "Twenty-five thou-;and. As soon as the painting's delivered to our man in Canada, you ;et it back plus the twenty-five hundred. And we get the bill of sale ınd affidavit back too."

Horton worried his lower lip. "I hadn't counted on any invest-ment," he said. "I'd want to think about it."

"Not too long."

"No," he said. "I'll call you tonight. And," he added, "the fee has ust gone up to five thousand. Definitely no less."

Nervous as ever, Lovell was sure we'd seen the last of our hundred ;ucks, but, true to his word, Horton called a little after five to say ıe'd decided to go along with the deal. The money would be trans-ferred down from his bank in Canada by Friday and we arranged ;o make the exchange then.

I asked Pauline to lunch that day and we were just getting back when Horton arrived to pick up the painting. To avoid an explosion I stashed her in a back room while I dealt with him in my office.

"I trust everything is ready for me," he said.

"Ready and waiting," I said. I showed him the bill of sale and affidavit, then put them back in their envelope. "But if you don't mind, I think I'll have a look at the money first."

"Of course," Horton said. He opened the briefcase he'd brought with him to reveal $25,000 in neat packages. "And while you're ;ounting that, since we're speaking of trust, perhaps you wouldn't mind if I just verified that the painting really is inside that suitcase as well."

"Be my guest," I said.

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Horton opened the case, removed the panel, and gazed lovingly at the painting inside, then replaced it and closed the case.

"I would say we're in business," he said.

"So would I," I said. I handed him the envelope and accepted the briefcase and money in return. "Our man in Canada will expect to hear from you," I said.

"Of course," Horton said. He moved to the door, clutching the suitcase under his arm. "Perhaps I shouldn't mention this," he said, "but there's an alternative to getting the painting out of the country. And that is to get out of the country yourself *after* selling it. I'm afraid I put two and two together and deduced that the importunate Mr. Carrdock was your mysterious American client. In any case, I took the liberty of contacting him at his hotel afterwards to verify the fact. Needless to say, his offer was considerably more than any paltry reward. So I'm afraid you'd better tell your man in Canada not to wait too long for my call."

He was gone before I could move.

Pauline burst in from the other room. "I told you that man was a crook, Harry," she said.

"Heard it all, did you?" I said.

"Every word. You wouldn't listen, though, would you? You were so smart. Well, I hope you're satisfied."

"Reasonably," I said. "And if I'm not, you should be." I took a packet of bills from Horton's briefcase. "How much did you say he owed you?"

"Five thousand."

"That's funny," I said. "When I asked Horton about it the other day, he said it was two."

"That liar!" she burst out. "I worked for him thirteen weeks if it was a day, and at three hundred a week that's—" She broke off and smiled sheepishly.

"Thirty-nine hundred," I said. "But take the five thousand anyway. You deserve at least a little interest for your time and trouble."

Pauline looked at me suspiciously. "You're too cheerful," she said. Suddenly comprehension flooded her face. "Harry, that painting—it was one of Lovell's forgeries, wasn't it?"

"Of course," I said. "There's a real *Girl with Bouquet,* and it was stolen just like the circular said. But by whom or for what purpose is beyond me. Lovell and I sure didn't have anything to do with it."

"So when Oliver Wendell goes to contact this man Carrdock—"

"He'll find him long gone, taken off for sunnier climes with the

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five hundred I paid him for a sterling performance. I suppose Horton could try to recoup by claiming the reward, but the insurance companies are pretty wary these days. The painting's good—all Lovell's work is—but it'll never stand up to the sophisticated scientific examination they'll give it."

"Beautiful!" Pauline said. "But—oh, Lord, he has that bill of sale! Won't he use that to cause trouble?"

"Hardly," I said. "While he was checking out the painting I took the liberty—as he would say—of switching envelopes on him. The one he has now contains a bill of sale for a *copy* of the *Girl with Bouquet,* and there's nothing illegal about copying any painting as long as it's so labeled."

"Harry," Pauline said, "I'll say it again—you're a real rat. But I love you." She put the money in her purse. "I'd love to stay too, but after all this I've had enough snow and cold for a while, and that sunnier-climes bit sounds very appealing. So I think I'll follow your Mr. Carrdock's example and be on my way."

"Don't let me stop you," I said. "Have a nice trip and goodbye."

"Au revoir," Pauline said.

## DETECTIVERSE

### *TAKING WAYS*

*by THOMAS CLEMMONS*

Maurice, a blackmailer in Paris,
Took a job on the side to embarrass
Certain felons he'd eyed
Who, with whisky well plied,
Were easy and gainful to harass.

There was a dour Scotsman named Walter
Whose nature his wife wished to alter.
But his habits were set,
So without much regret,
She killed him and moved to Gibraltar.

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*To Elaine, he was one of the younger gods—Hermes or Apollo—come to earth disguised as a mortal . . .*

# SOMETHING COMFORTING IN IT

**by JERROLD PHAON**

Elaine was poised on the stool, one hand holding the picture and nail to the wall, the other lifting the hammer, ready to strike, when the dog started making a racket in the back yard. The noise startled her and when she turned her head toward the door the picture slipped from its position.

Annoyed, she stepped down from the stool and glared at the spot on the wall where the picture was supposed to go. The dog continued to bark and she muttered through her teeth, "Damn you, Cerberus!" The picture, a pen-and-ink of Eurydice leaving the Underworld she had finished the night before, would have to wait to be hung. Moving aside a ceramic swan to make room for the hammer, she placed the picture on a hall table, then stepped into the living room to check on her little brother.

Bobby was huddled on the broken sofa, his bare spindly legs sticking out of the ratty blanket he always had with him. "You okay in here, honey?" she said.

The boy neither spoke nor turned his head to acknowledge her. Though he was now ten, he hadn't said a word in four years. Not since Momma had died. Autistic, the doctors had said. They'd wanted to put him in a special school, but Poppa wouldn't allow it. Elaine would take care of him, Poppa had said, and Elaine, though it meant leaving school herself before graduating, hadn't objected. Taking care of Bobby gave a measure of purpose to the meaninglessness and the hurt of her life, gave her someone to love, even though all he did during his waking moments was stare at the flickering lines of static on the broken television.

She could never begin to comprehend what it was Bobby saw

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ıere, but she was astute enough to realize he saw *something,* and ıat was enough. It protected him from the hurt of Momma's going vay and from the hurt Poppa inflicted on them. She liked to pretend ɔbby had found another world beyond those squiggly lines, a world here he was safe. Sometimes she dreamed about a world of her vn, one modeled after the ancient mythological world she read ɔout in stories populated with remarkable gods and goddesses, ɛroes and heroines, and—yes, they were a part of it too—monsters. was a world safe from Poppa's stinking whiskey breath, his rough ınds, his crude voice slurring, "Ah now, show me how you're my ·etty baby!" In mythology there was always a handsome hero or proud young god to slay the monster.

Cerberus continued his yapping. She said to Bobby, "I'm going ıtside for a minute," and tugged an edge of blanket over his thin g. Opening the back door, she stepped onto the porch.

In the yard, a young man was kneeling at the dog's dish, trying drink. He had moved the dish out of the barren arc of packed dirt ıd dog droppings surrounding the coop and Cerberus, like a de-ınged creature, kept up a steady yapping at the end of his taut ıain.

Elaine leaned against the porch rail and called out, "Are you all ght?" The young man froze in that kneeling position and Elaine ıw his eyes go glassy with fear. Then he wobbled to his feet and rked his body forward, but the movement was only a parody of ınning. He took a few steps and collapsed across the crumbling ·ment walkway that split the tiny yard in half.

She came down off the porch and went to where he lay gasping ı the ground. "I won't hurt you," she said, touching his shoulder.

He seemed to flinch at her touch and she pulled her hand away. 'lease don't be afraid," she said gently. Beneath the dirt and mud ıat covered him she saw he was wearing Army fatigues. "Why, ɔu're from Fort Malcolm," she said. She reached out and brushed s cheek with her hand. He closed his eyes and turned his head ward her touch, trembling like a newborn puppy.

"Hurt, too, looks like," she said. "Come on. You've got to help me ɛt you into the house."

He was a big young man, lanky and still raw-boned with youth, ıt Elaine managed to get him to stand and together they hobbled ·ross the yard, up the porch steps, and into the house, where she ıided him through the kitchen and into a shabby little living room. She eased him into Poppa's chair and tried to make him comfort-

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able. Then she hurried back to the kitchen and filled a chipped glas with tap water, which was warm and cloudy. The young man dran greedily, forcing Elaine to restrain him. "It isn't good for you t drink so fast," she said, taking the water from him. "You'll get sick.

The young man let his head loll back against the chair. His eye were barely open and she knew he was watching her. For a momen she was frightened, not because she felt she was in any physica danger from him but because she felt cut off from whatever it wa that was happening behind those slitted eyes. Then his eyelids flut tered and he winced with pain and Elaine remembered he was hurt

"Don't worry," she said. "Everything's going to be all right."

In the bathroom she found some antiseptic and a box of gauz bandages. From the sewing basket in her bedroom she got scissors When she returned to the living room, she saw that the young ma hadn't changed his position, although his head drooped a little lowe and his mouth was slack. This panicked her into thinking he ha died. She shook him roughly and cried, "Please, mister, please don be dead on me!"

"You're hurting me," he croaked.

She pulled back, startled. His eyes were all the way open now an she couldn't help noticing how pretty they were: hazel, with fleck of green. "I'm sorry," she said.

"My shoulder."

She nodded and, taking up the scissors, she slit his shirt, revealin a long gash across his shoulder and upper chest. She saw at onc that the gash wasn't deep and that the bleeding had more or les staunched itself. She began to clean the area around the cut wit warm water, working gently and moving closer to the jagged edge of the wound. The young man didn't wince, even when she applie the antiseptic, and she was proud of his courage. She covered th cut with gauze pads and wrapped a bandage around him.

"How did it happen?" she asked.

He didn't answer at first. He just sat looking at her in a vaguel interested sort of way, and she felt compelled to say something more as though to make up for his silence. "Your shirt's ruined. I can giv you one of Poppa's. It'll be too big but—"

He continued to stare at her and she felt herself begin to blush She touched her hair self-consciously and turned away, thinking My hair's a mess. There's a dirty coffee cup with a cigarette butt i it on the end table. Damn Poppa and his messes, damn this house

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his rotten old house. Because it struck her that the man was handome in a way she might attribute to a grieving young Orpheus.

"The sergeant—he hit me with a shovel," the young man said uietly. He sucked in a breath of air and coughed. "Then I hit him." Ie looked away. "Me and the sergeant don't see eye to eye on things. t doesn't matter. I don't like the Army much. All that talk of :illing." He smiled grimly. "Only person I ever wanted to kill was he sergeant. I guess I came pretty close to doing just that."

"But you can't just run away from the Army," she said fiercely. Ier father had been in the Army once, a career man, and she remembered what the Army had done to him, how it had made him ruel and ugly after the court martial. Or perhaps he had always een cruel and ugly, like the sergeant who had struck the young nan with the shovel. And after the Army had washed its hands of im, Poppa had had no other place to turn it loose except on her nd Bobby and Momma.

"They'll come after you."

"Will you tell on me?"

She bit her lip and closed her eyes, then shook her head no. "I ouldn't do that."

"What about the little fellow on the sofa?"

"You don't have to worry about Bobby," she said.

"And your parents?"

"There's just my father. He went down to the county seat for the lay. He won't be back 'til real late." She looked into his eyes. "So ou can rest up. I'll wake you and send you on your way in plenty f time."

He smiled. "I don't even know your name," he said.

"Elaine."

"Pretty name," he said without embarrassment. "And you're a ery pretty girl. I bet you have a lot of boy friends."

She bit her lip again. "You shouldn't tease."

"I'm not teasing."

His eyes captured hers and she could tell he was being sincere. She answered, "There was a boy, once. I met him in town. But Poppa aw me with him. He was a soldier, like you. Poppa doesn't like oldiers much." She glanced at the worn carpet. "Well, he went way," she said, adding almost bitterly,

"That's what soldiers do, isn't it? They go away."

Later, in the bathroom, she looked at her reflection in the mirror

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and wondered if it was true, if perhaps she just might be pretty. It was a matter that she had never really seriously considered until he'd said it. "You're a very pretty girl," he'd said. Because he'd said so, it was true. He was handsome and she was pretty.

When she came out of the bathroom, he was asleep on her bed and she was careful not to make any noise that might awaken him. She sat in her dead mother's rocker and stared out the window, rocking back and forth and thinking about the young man who lay asleep only a few feet away.

He is one of the gods, she pretended. One of the younger gods—Hermes or Apollo—come to earth disguised as a mortal. And she was the poor maiden who took pity on him. And in the end he would see her need, her ache, her hurt, and he would lift her up. She wanted to cross the room and look down upon him, as poor Psyche must have longed for a glimpse of her beloved Eros, but she was afraid that if she stirred, if she tested the gods too much, he would disappear like smoke, leaving her alone again. In the quiet dark, she felt her cheeks turn hot with tears: she didn't even know his name.

She slept, though she had vowed to remain awake, to savor every precious moment she had with him as much as to protect him. When she heard the car tires crush the gravel in the driveway she awoke suddenly, a rushing panic threatening to cut off her breath. Her father was home.

The car door coughed shut in the night air and his footsteps scraped the porch. She tugged at the blankets covering the young man sprawled in her bed. "Wake up!" she whispered fiercely, unable to call him by name. "Please! You must get out of here! He's coming!"

"Elaine!" her father called from the living room. Then, gruffly, to Bobby: "What the hell are you doing up, you little freak? *Elaine!*"

The young man suddenly came fully awake and sat up. In the moonlight Elaine saw fear ripple across his face, saw him open his mouth as though to speak. She brought her fingers to his lips and shook her head.

"I'm hungry," her father was saying. He was in the kitchen now. She brought the young man his clothes and knelt in front of him, helping him.

Then the light exploded in her bedroom and she looked up to see her father standing bull-like in the doorway. The young man was too stunned to react, except to stand and hitch up his pants.

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"Pig!" her father roared, charging into the room with all the force f an enraged beast, knocking the lamp from Elaine's dresser. The ıoonlight threw his huge shadow across the wall, and as he swept er aside and grabbed the young man Elaine was filled with the nage of Ariadne watching from the Labyrinth as Theseus battled ıe Minotaur. "You!" the Minotaur howled, slamming the young ıan into the wall. "You!"

He dragged the young man out into the narrow hallway. "No!" laine cried. "Leave him alone!"

"I'm gonna kill you, boy!" the bull said. He swung at the young ıan and knocked him against a table. Both the young man and the ıble crashed to the floor. Elaine's father threw himself on the young ıan, his massive hands encircling his neck.

"Poppa, no!" Elaine screamed. "You're killing him!" She saw the ammer she had been using to hang the picture of Eurydice: it had ıllen to the floor when the young man had crashed into the table. ler fingers closed around the handle. Eurydice, she wept. Don't look ack!

She stood behind her father and brought the hammer down on his ead. An odd tremor passed along her arm as the heavy metal conected with flesh and bone—it was as though some dark power ɔmmanded her to strike again and again, to obliterate forever somehing that was foul and unnatural.

When she opened her eyes, she was covered with blood and kneelıg over her now unrecognizable father. She moaned, casting the ammer aside. It landed on the picture of Eurydice, staining it. The oung man was crouching in a corner rubbing his neck. Elaine saw he horror in his eyes and turned away from it.

"Go," she said weakly, wearily, feeling something slip within her. *Please* go quickly." She closed her eyes and listened to the young ıan shuffle over the broken porcelain of the swan, heard the screen oor slam.

When she opened her eyes again they were filled with tears, but he couldn't for the life of her remember what it was she wanted to ry about.

She moved into the living room and sat on the sofa next to Bobby. he stared at the flickering static on the television set, giving herself p to it.

There was something comforting in it.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

**WILLIAM BRITTAIN**

*Predictably, the talk between Mr. Strang and Paul Roberts had gotten around to crime and detection, subjects on which the teacher and the detective held firm if somewhat divergent views . . .*

# MR. STRANG STUDIES EXHIBIT A

*by* ***WILLIAM BRITTAIN***

"The single superclue that allows the great detective to show his genius and crack the case may make for interesting detective fiction," Detective Sergeant Paul Roberts said positively "but in real life it's plain hard work by the police acting as a team wearing out shoeleather and following up every lead no matter how slim, that gets the crime solved."

Mr. Strang mopped the sweat from his face with a handkerchief Although the day was a scorcher even for August, it had been necessary for the gnomelike science teacher to take time out from preparing his curriculum for the upcoming school year to shop for a belated birthday gift for his nephew, a mere lad of forty-seven. Many of the shops in downtown Aldershot were air-conditioned, but the streets themselves were a fiery furnace. And since he had to pass the Municipal Building on his walk home, Mr. Strang decided to seek respite from the blistering sun by visiting Roberts in the detective squadroom on the second floor. Now, predictably, the talk had gotten around to crime and detection, subjects on which the teacher and the detective held firm if somewhat divergent views.

"But, Paul," said Mr. Strang, fanning himself with a blank arrest

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port, "don't you policemen speak of getting a break in a case? hat's that, if not some single fact that changes your perception of e whole problem?"

"Those breaks happen because we make 'em happen. We get out ere on the streets and we talk to people. We sift and analyze every ct, no matter how unimportant it seems. We work like dogs to ack our cases. It's only in stories that a detective can solve a urder just by noticing that Lord Twiddle is using a different brand toothpaste."

Roberts wiped a damp shirtsleeve across his forehead. "How about can of soda, Mr. Strang? We've got some that's cold."

"Sounds good. But, Paul, even in real life, there must be crimes at are solved by taking a single object or event and inferring—" ıe teacher paused and stared past Roberts, who had opened the ıor of the small refrigerator in the corner of the squadroom. "What blazes is that?"

"Soda," said Roberts, holding up a frosty green can. "Didn't you y you wanted some?"

"No, that other thing in the refrigerator. The one that looks like ı obelisk."

"Oh, this?" Roberts took out an object about eighteen inches long, ith a square base. From the base, each of the flat sides had a slight ward slant. The top had the shape of a tiny pyramid. All in all, resembled an eighteen-inch replica of the Washington Monument nstructed of galvanized sheet steel.

"It's a candle," said Roberts.

"A what?"

"A hand-poured candle. Still in its metal mold. And it's also a urder weapon. It'll be Exhibit A when Harry Robeling goes on ial next month."

"But why keep it in—"

"It's evidence. Normally we keep such stuff down in the property om in the basement, but in this weather that place gets hotter'n two-dollar pistol. So the D.A. asked if he could store it in our frigerator so it wouldn't melt. Go ahead, have a look. The lab boys e done with it so there's no risk of altering evidence. Here, take "

Mr. Strang grasped the wax-filled mold and almost dropped it—it eighed more than he'd expected. Slowly he turned it about in his ınds. A wick sprouted from the pointed top and the base was a flat,

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four-inch square of white candle wax. "Quite a weapon," he sai "It'd make a wicked club."

Roberts nodded. "Harry Robeling crushed Kirk Dansker's sku with that thing. Open-and-shut case. The trial's just a formalit But, hey!" He snapped his fingers. "This is a good example of wh I was talking about, Mr. Strang. About how the police work as team. You've read about the Dansker murder in the papers, haven you? There wasn't an awful lot at the time, but now with the tri coming up the papers are having a field day."

Mr. Strang shook his head. "I've been out of state most of th summer visiting friends," he replied. "And since returning, I've ha little time for the news, with the new school year to get ready fo Why don't you tell me about it?"

"O.K." Roberts relaxed contentedly in his chair and took a lon swig of soda. "It happened last fall—the night of October second, c maybe early morning on the third. But the real start was a wee or so before that, when Catherine Dansker got a note from he husband saying he was coming home."

"Slower, Paul, slower," said Mr. Strang. "Who's Catherine Dar sker? And why is it so important that her husband was comin home? Don't most husbands do that from time to time?"

Roberts smiled. "I forgot you hadn't read about the case. O.K Catherine Dansker lives over in the Mill Valley section of Aldersho Ten years ago she and her husband Kirk bought a house there—reall not much more than a shack. Kirk Dansker did odd jobs and Cath erine did some craft work at home that she sold to stores for th Christmas season—candles, mainly. The family managed to mak ends meet somehow. And then three years ago Kirk up and left."

"I see. But since he was murdered, I have to suppose he returned.

Roberts nodded. "Like I said, about a week before the murde Catherine Dansker got a letter from him. He had a new job as mechanic down South somewhere and he wanted to pick up som tools from the house. He said he was in a hurry—just passin through—and he'd be dropping by sometime around midnight o October second. Just long enough to get the tools, and then he'd b leaving again.

"But the thought of Kirk's returning scared Catherine Danske silly. It seems she had no desire to come face to face with her hus band. She contacted friends—George and Jean Greenwald, who liv on the next block. They offered to let Catherine spend the night a their place. On the day before her husband was due, George picke

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her up in his car when he came home from work. She turned on lights, unlocked the door, and left a note for Kirk to take whatever he needed but to be gone by morning."

"I have to assume, however," said Mr. Strang, "that death prevented Mr. Dansker's departure."

"Right. Enter the villain of the piece—Harry Robeling. Harry lived next door to the Dansker house, and after Kirk had left home Harry figured that Catherine was ripe for the picking. You should see this Robeling character, Mr. Strang. What a creep. Dirty, slimy teeth, breath that would kill a cow, and a mind like an open sewer. But he thinks he's God's gift to the female sex. I guess Catherine had to put up with him because he did some repairs around her house. For my money she'd have been better off doing 'em herself or leaving 'em undone. There's no way she should have gotten in debt to that hunk of sludge. But I guess he started calling on her pretty regular, like they were lovers or something."

"The murder, Paul," Mr. Strang reminded him. "Could we get to the murder?"

"Oh! Sure. The next morning, Catherine Dansker returned to her house, hoping she'd find that her husband had come and gone. Well, Kirk Dansker had arrived, all right, but he hadn't left. When Catherine entered the house, she found his body in the workroom in back, where she made the candles. The side of his skull was crushed. And beside the body was that candle, still in its mold. It was pretty obvious to the lab boys the thing had been used as a club. There was hair and blood and even bits of bone on it. All now neatly scraped into little envelopes for presentation in court."

"But how did you come to the conclusion that Harry Robeling was the killer?" asked Mr. Strang.

"Well, for one thing, we found several sets of his fingerprints in the living room—just *after* Catherine Dansker had cleaned it. No other prints at all, just his."

"But was there something else?"

"Yep. Y'see, Catherine Dansker had one piece of valuable jewelry—a gold necklace with a small emerald in it. It had been her mother's, and even when money was tight she'd never sold it. Anyway, when she called the police they asked her if anything was missing, and it didn't take her long to discover that the necklace was gone.

"We've got a set procedure for locating stolen goods. We put out a bulletin to every pawnshop for miles around saying we're looking

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for some article. And guess what? Six weeks after the murder, Harry turned up at a shop over in Holtsville and wanted to pawn the necklace. The proprietor called us, and we were able to pick Harry up before he'd even left the shop. And y'know what he told us? Get this, Mr. Strang. He denied ever coming near the Dansker house that night. He said he'd found the necklace hanging on the front doorknob of his own place. Man oh man! Did you ever hear such a yarn?

"Here's the way the case shapes up. Late at night on October second, Harry looks over and sees lights still on in the Dansker house. Aha, he thinks, Catherine's having a little trouble getting to sleep. So he goes over, planning on 'relaxing' her a bit, not knowing she's at the Greenwalds' and the house is empty. But when he gets there and opens the unlocked door, there's nobody home. He gets to looking around, spots that necklace, and grabs it, figuring nobody'll be the wiser.

"But just about then, Kirk Dansker walks in, looking for his tools. He sees Harry Robeling with the necklace. Robeling runs into the workroom to get away, and when Kirk Dansker follows Robeling hits him with the candle and returns home with the necklace still on him. Like I said, an open-and-shut case.

"But the whole point, Mr. Strang, is that even a case as simple and straightforward as this one took a lot of police teamwork and attention to detail to get it ready to be presented in court. Harry Dobbs and I interviewed Catherine Dansker four times just to make sure her story was coherent. We had to question the Greenwalds. A couple of men from the homicide division interrogated Robeling for days, with his lawyer objecting to everything. Naturally, Robeling lied through his teeth the whole time. Then there was the pawnshop bulletin to get ready and distribute. Hundreds of hours put in by the uniformed patrolmen. Reports and reports and more reports on everything. Teamwork and attention to detail, Mr. Strang. That's the reason Harry Robeling's going to be pronounced guilty next month."

"You seem pretty sure of that." Mr. Strang tossed off the last of the soda from the green can. "The case is still a little unclear in my mind, Paul. Let's start with the Greenwalds. You interviewed them. How did they react when Catherine Dansker first contacted them?"

Roberts reached into a desk drawer and took out a folder with a thick sheaf of official police reports. He glanced through them before answering. "Well, they were surprised when Mrs. Dansker asked

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them, they said, but they were happy to offer her a place to stay for the night. After work, George Greenwald stopped by the workshop to pick her up and—huh, here's a funny thing. Kind of ironic, really."

"What's that, Paul?"

"When George came by to pick Catherine up, he watched her take a panful of melted wax from the stove and pour it into that candle mold. She filled it right up to the top. Greenwald said he even remembered a little wax dribbling down the outside of the mold. Catherine told him she wanted the wax to cool overnight so she could decorate the candle the next day. Imagine that. Greenwald actually saw the murder weapon being made."

"Anything else?" asked the teacher.

"Not much. Catherine was the perfect guest. The Greenwalds wanted her to sleep in the guest room upstairs, but she insisted that was too much bother and used the couch in the living room. An argument almost started, but Catherine got her way."

"I see. You mentioned that in your investigation you found Harry Robeling's fingerprints in the living room. What's the significance, Paul? Wouldn't you expect to find them there if he was a frequent visitor?"

Roberts shook his head. "Like I said, Mr. Strang, Catherine Dansker had spent several hours cleaning that room just before Greenwald picked her up. Any prints that were there previously would have been wiped away. But during the investigation, the fingerprint crew found Robeling's prints on the lamp, an ashtray, and the polished wood arms of the easy chair. No other prints—just Harry Robeling's.

"It's pretty clear that when he entered the house that night he sat down a while and handled some things in the living room—*after* Catherine had done her cleaning. Police teamwork again, Mr. Strang. No miracle clues. Just doing things by the book."

"Uh huh," replied the teacher absently. "One last thing, Paul. Just to get things straight in my mind. Earlier on you mentioned the Dansker 'family'. That word implies one or more children. A couple is almost always referred to as 'husband and wife'—or their given names if they're not married. Did the Danskers have children?"

"That has nothing to do with the case, Mr. Strang, and —"

"Paul, it's a simple question. Did the Danskers have children?"

Roberts sighed and nodded. "They had a little girl. Now, for Pete's sake, don't let on to Catherine Dansker that I told you this."

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"Why not, Paul? What happened?"

"That's the reason Kirk Dansker left his wife. Yeah, you're right. The Danskers had a little girl. Just a toddler. One day Catherine was melting down a big pot of candle wax on her stove in the workroom. Her attention was distracted, and the kid managed to reach the handle of the pot. She pulled the whole thing over and the hot wax poured over her. Burned her horribly. She died the next day in the hospital.

"Kirk never got over it. He blamed his wife. According to the neighbors, they screamed at one another for two weeks. Then Kirk left and Catherine was left alone. But that was years ago."

Roberts stared ruefully into space. "I didn't mean for this to come out," he said. "I just wanted to show you how police teamwork solved the case. And I think I've made my point, Mr. Strang."

Mr. Strang leaned across the desk and spoke in a low, confidential tone. "I don't think you fully comprehend the point you have made, Paul."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"You have a good solid case here."

"Of course we have. When Robeling goes to trial—"

"But it's not against Harry Robeling."

"You're not saying—"

Mr. Strang nodded. "On the basis of what you've told me here—and you've gone into quite some detail—I'm convinced that Catherine Dansker killed her husband."

Roberts groaned in exasperation. "But she was at the Greenwalds' when Kirk came home. And those fingerprints in the living room weren't hers—they were Robeling's. And Robeling had the necklace. Do you want me to believe he found it hanging on his doorknob the way he said?"

"Why not, Paul?"

"O.K., O.K." Roberts got to his feet, stomped angrily to the refrigerator, and took out another can of soda. "All right, Mr. Hot-Shot Teacher who's better than the whole police force. How come you think Catherine Dansker killed her husband?"

"First, let's consider why she might do such a terrible thing. Here we have a woman whose husband is convinced her negligence killed their child. Perhaps she was afraid of how the little girl's death would affect Kirk. As the months went by and the thing preyed on his mind, might he not one day return with revenge in his heart?

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Were the tools simply a ruse to gain entrance to the house, where he could get his hands on Catherine herself?

"Again, maybe Catherine could never forgive her husband for leaving her because of an accident that anyone might cause. Might not Catherine seek revenge for such a slight? We don't know. But it could be that Catherine Dansker herself felt incredible guilt because of the accident. And the embodiment of that guilt was her husband, who had accused her so cruelly and then walked out. Perhaps she sought expiation in his death.

"Fear? Revenge? Guilt? Or a combination of all three? Yes, Catherine Dansker might well wish her husband dead."

"But you're still not giving any solid evidence, Mr. Strang. Remember the fingerprints—"

"Oh, yes, those telltale fingerprints of Harry Robeling's. Paul, earlier on you told me Catherine Dansker had cleaned the living room just before Greenwald got there. And the way you said it disturbed me. You asserted it as an absolute fact. But you weren't there. The only way you could have gotten that information was by questioning Mrs. Dansker."

Roberts' face turned a brilliant red. "Of course she told us!" he snapped. "But—"

"But I don't think she told the truth, Paul. If I'm correct Catherine Dansker cleaned the room, all right, but she did it several hours—or even days—beforehand. And after she'd cleaned she talked Harry Robeling into paying another of his visits. It shouldn't have been too difficult to talk him into it from what you tell me about him. He came inside, he sat in the chair, he rested his hands on the arms. He touched several other objects as well. Meanwhile Catherine was taking great pains to touch nothing. Only Robeling's fingerprints were to be in that room.

Mr. Strang settled back in his chair. "And once he'd left, the whole area was off limits to everyone—even Catherine herself. It wouldn't be too hard. Robeling seems to have been the only outsider who entered the house regularly. Even Greenwald mentioned picking Catherine up at the rear workroom. I suspect Catherine insisted on that. She didn't want Greenwald anywhere near that living room."

"All very neat—and very wrong," said Roberts in a tired voice. "You're forgetting that Catherine was at the Greenwalds' house the night of the murder. Or were they in on the plot too?"

Mr. Strang shook his head. "No, they only provided the alibi. I was struck by Catherine's insistence that she sleep on the living

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room couch when the guest room had been offered. Why have even the semblance of an argument over such a simple thing? I don't think Catherine was worried about inconveniencing her hosts. But the guest room would presumably require that anyone leaving the house late at night walk about on the second floor, descend a flight of stairs, and then roam about the first floor before reaching a door. The living room, on the other hand, must have been somewhere near the front door, which could have been easily unlocked from the inside and then locked again on her return. In short, Catherine chose the couch simply so as not to wake the Greenwalds when she walked back to her own house.

"Once at home, Catherine went to her workshop and remained there, knowing full well that as soon as her husband arrived he'd go directly there."

"Yeah?" said the detective, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "Well, the front door was the one left unlocked. And the entrance to the cellar—where Kirk's tools were kept—is just inside it, to the right. Since the workroom's at the rear of the house, there'd be no reason for him to go anywhere near it."

"Oh, Catherine had a way of luring him there. And when she did she struck him down with the candle. Afterward, she took the necklace to Robeling's house and hung it on the doorknob, knowing full well the story'd sound ridiculous when Harry told it to the police. Then she returned to the Greenwalds'.

"Harry found the necklace the following day. He didn't know who owned it, but it had obvious value. I'm sure he wasn't about to let on to anyone that he had it. Still, he had to wait a few weeks to see if any claimant would advertise for it. When the owner didn't turn up, he tried to pawn it, and you caught him. End of plot, and Catherine Dansker walks away free and clear. And yet she's the one who killed Kirk Dansker."

For a long moment Roberts stared at his desk, and there was no sound in the squadroom except the whirring of the electric fan near the window.

"You're pretty positive about all this, aren't you, Mr. Strang?" he said finally.

"Yes, Paul. I am."

"But why? I'll grant, if we didn't have so much evidence against Robeling, that Catherine Dansker could—I only say could—have murdered her husband in the way you said. Maybe she could some-

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how have got him to the workroom where she could club him to death. But what makes you so damn sure she *did?"*

"We've come full circle," said the teacher. "At the beginning of our conversation this afternoon we talked about the single all-important clue on which an entire case may pivot. This case has such a clue. And barring some fact of which I'm not aware, that clue will put Catherine Dansker on trial as surely as it will free Harry Robeling."

"And what clue is that?" asked Roberts with a smirk.

"You have it here in this office," Mr. Strang replied. "The candle, of course. The murder weapon."

"The candle!" Roberts exploded. "But how—"

"Paul, according to George Greenwald, Catherine Dansker filled the candle mold with melted wax just before she left the house with him. 'She filled it right up to the top' were his words. Then she left the house and, according to her story, didn't return until the following day when she discovered her husband's body."

"That's right."

"That's wrong, Paul. That's wrong because the base of the candle is absolutely flat."

"Yeah, it's flat. So what?"

"When molten candle wax solidifies, it shrinks considerably. Normally the hardening wax will cling to the sides of the mold and shrink away from the areas where no metal touches it—in this case, the base. To completely fill a mold as big as this one it'd be necessary to make several pourings, letting each one cool."

"I don't—"

"If Catherine Dansker had made that candle at a single pouring, the hardening wax, contracting as it set, would have left a large depression or 'socket' at the base of the candle. But the base is quite flat. This mold had to be filled several times, the wax cooling and shrinking each time, to give the candle a flat base."

"Maybe Robeling—or Kirk—"

"Ridiculous! What reason would they have to melt candle wax?"

"Well, what reason did Catherine herself have?"

"Catherine Dansker went back to her house that evening for the purpose of killing her husband. She concealed herself in the workroom quite some time before he was scheduled to appear. But she needed something—some bait—to get Kirk away from the front of the house where any action she took might be seen by a neighbor

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with insomnia. It was then she melted the wax, using it to complete the candle she'd begun earlier that day.

"Sometime in the early morning hours, Kirk Dansker came up the front walk and entered the house. He was prepared to collect his tools and leave again. But then he sensed something—something that brought back all the horror of the tragic death of his child. And because of that, he was drawn to the workroom like a moth to a flame."

"What was that?" asked Roberts.

"The stench of hot candle wax, which must have permeated the entire house, the same odor he associated with that day when his child pulled the pot off the stove. He ran to the workroom to see why that awful smell should be there in the middle of the night—and his wife struck him down."

There was a long silence in the squadroom as Roberts stared at his desk and doodled on a report form with a ballpoint pen. "You—you're sure about the shrinkage of the wax, Mr. Strang?" he asked finally.

"Yes, Paul. Try it out for yourself. You don't need a candle mold and special wax. A tin can and a block of paraffin will do. Any molded candle—especially one as massive as that one—must be poured several times to fill it up."

"Oh, boy," Roberts sighed. Several minutes ticked by on the wall clock as the detective turned the problem over in his mind. Finally he looked at Mr. Strang and a series of odd sounds came from his parted lips.

He was laughing.

"Wait until I dump this into Jerry Partinger's lap," he chortled. "He's going to have a fit."

He picked up the telephone and dialed a single number. "Give me the D.A.'s office," he muttered into the receiver.

"Hello, Jerry? Paul Roberts. Look, I'm sitting here talking to a gentleman—he's a school teacher, if you must know—and, yeah, Jerry, I know you're busy, but you'd better get over here and talk to him before the Robeling case goes to trial. You see, there's this one clue, and it's got me looking at the case from a new angle.

"Hello, Jerry. Jerry?"

"Q"

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## DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*This is the 595th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, a poignant story about choosing-out sides and the lasting bonds of friendship . . .*

*The author, Joseph C. Stinson, is a resident of California who says, "For the better part of the ten or so years since school I made a precarious but exuberant living in the theater as a director and actor. For the present, I can only repeat what F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote on the occasion of his first sale, 'Everything has changed.' " As for the future, Mr. Stinson is at work on his first novel. Look for it . . .*

# TEAMMATES

### by JOSEPH C. STINSON

Cold. Colder than yesterday. I think. I don't feel it much. Not like him. Least he stopped coughin. Coat I got from the guy had the matches is a beaut. Thick. Hope it makes him warm. We can have a fire tonight. Now I got matches. Nobody'll spot the flame with boards up. They was the ticket booth. Make nice walls. Keep us safe. Cuts the wind too. Yeah, I think we're gonna make out.

What a spot to find! It's like gettin walked in with the winnin run on four pitches. Who woulda thought?

Just wish Danny'd get off bein mad.

Ain't askin for him to tell jokes or nothin. Just do somethin, talk to me a little bit. Ain't never seen him keep a pout on so long. Won't do nothin. Just sits. Starin. Too mad to blink even.

Maybe if I work his glove a little.

Musta told him a hundred times the three days we been here. "Work your glove in the winter or come spring you'll swear you're playin with an iron hand." But he don't listen. Oughta know better. It was him taught me.

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Ain't no big deal bout the glove but we gotta be ready. We'll be playin a whole lot of ball here this summer and our gear oughta be in shape. I'm gonna do up the mound and basepaths like a real groundskeeper. I know Danny always used to say when we was kids and he was learnin me the best ways to pick up and deliver the ball, "It ain't the glove, it's the guy wearin it." But so what? It's the bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, you're one up and you gotta go deep in the hole or backpeddle to the fence, who wouldn't want a little edge like a kid-soft glove with a scooped-out pocket? Know I would. I'll take anything I can get.

Hey, is that another one? Hope he comes out in the open like them this mornin. Thought they was smart sneakin up on the food while I was sleepin. Dumb things. You gotta be careful if you don't want to get caught. The one shouldn'ta waved his tail in my face if they wanted to pull it off. Bet they was surprised when I swiped them up before they could beat it away. Left hand's my glove hand. Wouldn'ta squeezed them but they was stealin the baloney I was hopin Danny would eat. And he don't like them anyways. Says they're dirty and carry sickness. He sure don't need to be sicker than he is already. So I done it. Just made a fist. Felt like a big old wet sponge. Buried them out by third base.

He ain't shiverin no more. I hope he feels better.

Danny's trouble is he's one guy never needed no edge. He had it all. He was a burner. Nobody could run like him, or hit like him, or shoot baskets or throw passes like him. He was it. Flat out. The best.

Knocked me out the day he picked me for his team. First took. Couldn't believe what was goin on. He always got to choose-out for sides cause he was the best—and he picks me. Before anybody else! Never forget the day. "Back when," Danny calls it. Ain't back nowhere to me. It's right at the front of my brain.

It started awful. I was at the park, hopin like always to get in a game. Never had made it but kept tryin. I run out of linseed oil workin my glove that mornin so I used some of my mom's kitchen oil. Sure shagged flies that day—only none were the kind came off the bats of hitters. The kids around, even the little ones who was scared of me, lit into me good. Called me "salad bowl" and "fly trap." It was crummy but at least it was different than Frankenstein and King Kong and the other lousy names they was always callin me. The names didn't bother me so much but I thought my glove was shot. Guess I busted out cryin.

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All of a sudden somebody's takin my glove off my hand. I look up and it's Danny. I felt more bad him seein me cryin like a big baby. Before I could wipe my eyes he's puttin his glove on my hand. He didn't say nothing, just stuck it on—his own glove, a five-finger job. Infield or outfield. Big web, nice padding. And names all over it. Danny went to a lotta games and he had got some of the best guys in baseball to sign his glove. Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Richie Ashburn.

Then he puts on my glove and walks away to choose-out sides for a game. I didn't know what the heck was goin on.

Then he picks me. First. The others think he's foolin but he ain't. He says if he plays, I play. And I did. Right field. Next to Danny in center. It was great.

I don't remember my dad much. He went out one night and never came back. He was always lookin at me. Funny kinds of looks. I wish he coulda seen me that day.

I played every time after that too.

Always on Danny's side. He always picked me.

Be dark soon. I gotta get Danny soup. Make it hot on the fire. He's gotta eat—he ain't had nothin since we come here. I didn't have time to look for soup last night. The bars on the grating cross the front of that store was easy to bend but when I pushed the door in all that loud ringin started. I gotta watch out for them bells. I think they're hooked up with wires. Gotta take care of the wires first, I guess. I gotta be careful.

Good thing I bumped into that guy had matches and the coat. Two guys I got the night before didn't have nothin. Bums. They smelled. Stuck them out in left field. Put the other guy there too.

Hope Danny gets unmad soon. I don't like it when he's mad.

After my mom died, they was gonna send me to some place but Danny said no. His folks was gone too and he didn't have no brothers or sisters so he says come live with him. Keep each other company.

Danny was alone since he come back from the Army. They sent him to war and he got hurt. Stepped on a bomb. Blew his legs off.

Wish there was a way to give him some of mine. I could do without half of them and still be okay.

We had a lot of fun together. Listenin to games on the radio. Danny readin me the sports pages. And goin to the ball park. That was the best. We came here lotsa times. That was easy cause we lived so close. When I heard they were buildin a new one I got scared but Danny says don't worry, we'll find that new place.

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Then the guy starts pounding on our door, says we gotta get out—says they're gonna tear the old dump down—says we're the last ones and he's gonna get the cops—says the city's got nice places for crips and retards. Don't like people callin Danny names. Wise guys.

Wasn't so wise when I opened the door.

Wasn't so wise with his face pointin the opposite way from his body.

That's when Danny got mad at me.

That's when I moved us out. At night. Didn't know where to take us. Just walked around. Didn't mind carryin Danny. He don't weigh nothin. But it was rainin. I was afraid he'd catch cold.

Then I saw it. Right in front of me. The old ballpark. Perfect.

It's fallin apart a little but I found us a place behind the home-plate boxes. Gonna fix it nice.

Danny don't have to worry. It's my turn.

I'm choosin-out. And I pick him.

Dark now. Gotta go.

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**a *NEW* Selena Mead story by**

**PATRICIA McGERR**

*Finland shares a border with the Soviet Union. It is an unaligned country with political and economic links to both East and West. There could be many reasons to choose it as a meeting place, a delivery point, a communications center. That, Selena thought, might answer the question, Why Helsinki? But it didn't answer the other question—Why Selena? . . .*

# A DATE IN HELSINKI

***by PATRICIA McGERR***

The international trade conference in Stockholm ended with a banquet on Friday evening. Selena, covering the event for her magazine, caught up with the American delegate as he left the ballroom and asked him to clarify the final statement.

"You know I can't do that," he told her. "Ambiguity is the heart of a joint communiqué. That's the only way we can all sign it and then go home to claim that we each won the most concessions for our country. Don't expect me to sacrifice that to clarity. When do you go back to Washington?"

"Tomorrow. On the noon flight."

"Great. So do I. We can talk on the plane."

"Ambiguously, I presume."

"Or off the record," he retorted. "You have a choice."

She went to the hotel desk for her key and with it was given a long white envelope.

"This was delivered by messenger," the clerk explained. "It came about an hour ago."

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She thanked him and looked at the return address. Quest Travel Agency. Not one she had heard of. Probably nonexistent. The initial letter indicated a communication from the small secret intelligence unit headed by her husband and known to its operatives as Section Q. Why were they sending her a message? Had something happened to Hugh? She felt a sudden rush of fear. Selena's first husband had been killed on a job for Q and there lurked always on the fringes of her mind the possibility of its happening again.

She moved swiftly to the elevator, stopping on the way to refuse an invitation to join several of her colleagues in the bar. The car rose with maddening slowness to the tenth floor while she gripped the envelope tightly. But she resisted the urge to open it until she was alone in her room.

There she found an airline ticket made out in her name. She was scheduled to fly from Stockholm to Helsinki on Finnair flight 792 at 11:25 the next morning. There was nothing else in the envelope. No instructions. No note of explanation. She thought of calling Hugh in Washington but at once dismissed the idea. They couldn't discuss Section Q's business on an insecure line. The plane ticket told her all she, at that moment, needed to know. She had an assignment in Helsinki.

Arriving at the airport an hour early, she checked in, left her luggage, and found a seat in the waiting area. Someone would have to tell her how to proceed after the plane landed and she had allowed ample time in case the briefing was programmed before takeoff.

Looking about at the other travelers she saw no one who seemed a likely contact. But experience had taught her to disregard appearances, so when a young man with a baby in a backpack stopped beside her she was prepared to hear a Q-initialed sentence identifying him as a fellow agent. Instead he asked, in a crisp New England accent, if she'd mind watching his daughter while he went to the men's room. Getting her consent, he put the backpack with its occupant on the seat beside her and hurried away. She rummaged in her handbag for her key chain, dangled it in front of the child, who reached for it, and, when it was pulled away, gurgled happily at the new game.

Will this, she reflected, confuse my Section Q contact? Whatever description Hugh gave him—or her—to aid in recognizing her, it certainly didn't include an infant. Or was the infant her assignment? Perhaps a putative father had permanently disappeared and it was

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Selena's job to take his little girl into Finland. But that guess was erased by the young man's return. And while he was rebuckling the pack on his back, flight 792 was announced. She was not, it appeared, to learn why she was flying to Helsinki until she arrived there.

Unless, she amended, as she took her assigned seat, she was to be briefed en route. But her seatmate was a plump blonde laden with parcels and bound, she told Selena, for a family reunion. A Finn married to a Swede, she anticipated seeing not only her relatives who had remained at home but a brother who worked in Leningrad.

"Is it difficult to go from Leningrad to Helsinki?" Selena asked her.

"Oh, no. The roads are good. He can drive in a few hours. Of course, by air it is faster. Or for a tourist, you may enjoy to go by ship. Any route, it is an easy trip."

And that, Selena thought, may answer the question, Why Helsinki? Finland and the Soviet Union share a border. It's an unaligned country with political and economic links to both East and West. There can be many reasons to choose it as a meeting place, a delivery point, a communications center. But that doesn't answer the other question—Why me? Hugh is usually very unwilling to involve me in Section Q affairs. In any event, someone will have to give me all the answers very soon. The ticket has brought me this far, but once I'm off the plane I'll have no idea where to go or what to do. I'll just have to wait in the airport for them to find me.

The fifty-minute flight was soon over. She had only a short wait for her suitcase, showed her passport to a courteous official, and passed into the main part of the building. There she looked about for Q's representative. Who will it be? she wondered. A messenger bringing directions for me to carry out alone? Or a principal I'm to assist? And what—

As her eyes swept the entrance, she saw with a shock a familiar face.

"Hugh!"

"Selena!" He covered the distance between them in seconds. "Your plane was on time. That's a surprise. And you already have your luggage. Good. I've a cab waiting." He picked up the suitcase and turned toward the door. She followed, thoughts awhirl, trying to adjust to the new circumstances. She had talked to Hugh yesterday morning, told him her flight number and Washington arrival time,

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and he had promised to meet her at National Airport. Instead he had flown to Finland. It must have been a sudden decision.

She suppressed her curiosity in the taxi, followed Hugh's lead in talking about the flight, the weather, and other banalities fit for the driver to hear. And in the hotel to which he took her they were equally discreet. To assume that anyplace that can be bugged may be bugged was standard operating procedure.

"It's such a fine day," he announced, "I thought we'd buy a lunch and eat in the park across the street. I'm sure you're hungry."

"Yes, I am. Very." Her emphasis made clear that her hunger was more for information than for food. Out in the open air, with no chance of listening ears, they could at last talk freely.

A small pub-type restaurant near the hotel supplied fresh fish sandwiches and bottles of Finnish beer. In the park on the shores of a broad bay, they sat on a bench and spread the food between them. A warm sun filtered though the leaf-laden trees.

"Pleasant, isn't it?" Hugh asked. "A splendid way to unwind after a busy week."

"I may be unwinding," Selena returned, "but you're not. You came here for Section Q."

"True. But it was pure luck that the job coincided with your Stockholm meeting, so we can turn it into a holiday as well."

"Turn me into cover, you mean. You didn't change all my reservations just so we could have a picnic in Helsinki. Whatever the job is, you'll be less conspicuous as half of a touring couple than as an American traveling alone. Since I'm being used as camouflage, I've a right to know what it's about."

"I can't argue with that." He paused to take a bite of sandwich and a swallow of beer. "However—"

"However, it's against the rules." She finished his sentence, then recited, " 'All personnel operate on a need-to-know basis. There will be no exchange of nonessential information.' All right, I won't pressure you, since I know it's useless."

"However—" he wiped his mouth and continued as if there had been no interruption "—you don't need to persuade me. I'm about to tell you everything. Or almost everything. The problem is one you may be able to help solve. It has to do with a small but strategically important country."

"Whose name—" she smiled wryly "—I don't need to know."

"Right. Although you can probably make a good guess. The regime is friendly to us, or at least not openly hostile, and has great influence

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on its neighbors. There are a number of groups plotting its overthrow and we try to keep a close watch on them all. Most of them are small and disorganized but one has been growing in size and power and is almost ready to strike. If it does—well, it could be like lighting the first in a string of firecrackers. The entire region may explode."

"When is this due to happen?"

"That's the crucial question," he answered. "We were able to turn around a man in the rebels' top council. He's been sending out reports for several months. Until last week they were fairly routine. Then he sent word that they'd raised enough money to buy weapons and were in touch with a source that will supply everything they need for a small-scale revolution. He gave us most of the details. A list of the weapons, how and where the transfer will take place. All we lack is the delivery date. That's to be set by the supplier and unfortunately our man won't be able to pass it on to us. He was killed in a car crash two days ago."

"An accident?"

"It looked like one. He was confident no one suspected him, so it may have been. At any event, we've lost our informant when we need him most."

"If you know the delivery point, can't you set a watch until the weapons arrive?"

"That may be anytime in the next three weeks. Since it's in a remote mountain area, we can't put observers there without them being observed. Then the rebels would change their plans and we'd come up empty. Our only hope is to learn the date in advance and mount a surprise attack."

"Is that why we're here?"

"Yes." He crumbled bits of bread left from his sandwich and scattered it for the birds. "Helsinki, as neutral ground, was picked for the rendezvous. Our man's final report said that the arms merchant was working out a timetable and would send a messenger here today to let the buyers know when to expect shipment. Luckily for us, neither side trusts the other. And the rebels are especially wary of letting any outsider know who they are. Since they keep everything within the inner circle, one of the movement leaders is coming. According to our informant, they worked out a careful procedure for him to learn the date without revealing his own identity."

"How can he do that?"

"Our man didn't tell us. When he sent the report, it wasn't necessary. He expected to be at the next meeting, learn the date, and

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pass it on to us. But now he's dead and we've got to intercept the message here today."

"Do you know who is coming for it?"

"Yes, we even have his picture." He pulled from his pocket a sketch of a hawk-nosed man with a pointed beard. "His code name is Cactus and he's on a plane due to land in—" he checked his watch— "one hour and twenty minutes. One of our people is sitting behind him. Another will pick up his trail at the airport. There are two more based at the hotel where he has his reservation."

"The one where we're staying, I presume."

"Of course. We've been liberal with agents so that he won't see the same face too often and sense he's been followed. Since we don't know who's representing the seller or when they're to meet, we have to maintain constant surveillance."

"You can't follow him into his room," Selena pointed out. "Have you put a mike there and tapped his phone?"

"No. We're sure the meet will take place in the open. The entire transaction has been hedged with caution to keep the gun runners from identifying any of the rebels. They don't want them to add a blackmail bonus to the selling price."

"But if he uses an assumed name, how could they— Oh, I see. If they know his room number, someone can take his picture. But, good heavens, Hugh, they've set themselves an impossible goal. There's no way he can get his answer without risking recognition. Even if he's arranged to exchange a password at night in a dark alley, someone can follow him into the light. Even a dead drop isn't risk-free. He can't be sure there won't be someone with a camera waiting for him to pick it up. I don't see how it can be done."

"Neither do I." He put the bottles and sandwich wrappings into a paper bag and stood up. "But they found a way and we'd better match them before it's too late. If the arms shipment goes through, the whole area may be lost to us. Whereas if we get there in time to stop it, we'll earn gratitude with a great future value."

They strolled along the path through the trees, bought ice-cream cones at an open booth and continued their walk in silent thought. How can two strangers meet, Selena asked herself, so that X can give Z a message while both remain nameless and faceless? Or am I making it harder than it really is?

"Is anonymity imperative for both sides?" she asked Hugh.

"No, only for the rebel leader. The gun runners can hire someone

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to pass on the date without knowing what it means or who hired him. He can be in the open. Why?"

He studied her face with rising hope. "You have an idea how it can be done?"

"Sorry, no. I'm just trying to define the problem. It's not quite as unmanageable if only one of the parties has to stay under cover."

"They had a week to figure out a method. We have to do it in hours." Again he checked his watch. "We'd better get back to the hotel. I want to make sure everyone is in place."

Hugh stayed in the lobby where a display of picture postcards provided an observation post. Selena went on to their room. She wished they were really on holiday. It was a beautiful country and an interesting one, with no end of things to do and see. Even right here in the hotel. She picked up a card from the dressing table which listed services and attractions. There were three dining rooms, keyed to every taste and budget. Music for dancing in the roof garden from 7:00 P.M. to midnight. A ground-floor casino opened at 5:00 P.M. It was, the card informed her, run by the government with profits going to charity. A comfortable way to gamble, she mused. If I lose, the orphans win.

Returning to the lobby, she found that Hugh had moved to a couch and appeared to read a London newspaper. She stopped at the cashier's cage to change a traveler's check into Finnmarks before going to join him.

"Any news?"

She sat close to him and kept her voice low, though the couch was in a far corner with no one within earshot.

"Our friend checked in ten minutes ago. He's gone to his room. One of our people is in the hall outside. I'm watching the elevator. Have you any suggestions?"

"I'm going to try my luck in the casino."

"Oh?" His eyebrows tilted, seeking explanation.

"There are lots of numbers on a roulette wheel. Some people play their birthdays. Others may put their chips on a different kind of date."

"I like it," he said. "Perhaps we'll meet there later."

The casino was small with, at that early hour, only one table in use. Selena gave the operator a 20-Finnmark note and received ten orange chips. There were five other people at the table—a young man in jeans and a UCLA T-shirt, an elderly couple who conferred

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with each other in Spanish before placing their chips, a tall, turbanned East Indian, and a sharp-featured woman of about fifty in a gray-tweed tailored suit. As the wheel spun, Selena studied the table. UCLA's chips were blue—there was one on number 7. The Spaniards had green chips on 2, 12, and 20. The Indian had put his browns on even, black and 0. The woman's yellow were on black, 25 and 36.

Selena made a mental calculation. Today was July 24. Hugh said the shipment must take place within three weeks, which made August 14 the latest possible date. So the operative number for the month would be 7 or 8 and for the day between 25 and 31 or 1 and 14.

The wheel slowed, the little ball hovered near 7, then dropped on the red 18. The croupier added a brown chip to the one on even and swept away all the others. The Spaniards conferred again, agreed to play 3, 13, and 30. UCLA put one on 27. The Indian left his doubled stake on even, dropped two chips on each black and 0. The woman put chips on red, 8 and 9. "Make your plays," the croupier repeated and Selena dropped a chip on odd a second before he said, "No more." Again the Indian was the only winner as the ball stopped on 22.

On the next dozen spins Selena, alternating odd and even, won only four times while she studied the other players' patterns. UCLA, his supply of chips dwindling, bet only one at a time, alternating 7 and 27. July 27? Day after the day after tomorrow? That was calling it very close but, if the arms shipment was already en route, not impossible. Yet the rebels had gone to such lengths to cover their trail and keep their plans secret it seemed out of character to make the date announcement so obvious.

But if not UCLA, who? The Spaniards, after a final conference, eliminated themselves by gathering up their chips and leaving. The gray-suited woman each time put down three chips, one on red or black, the other two on numbers. But the numbers seemed to be chosen at random, with her yellow chips roaming the table from high to low to middle and back again. Perhaps she was a professional gambler with an intricate system. If so, it wasn't working. She won a little more than she lost on red and black, but her numbers had not yet clicked. Yet she showed no sign of tension, seemed untroubled by her diminishing pile of chips. It was as if she played only to pass the time, unconcerned as to whether she won or lost. As if—

"How're you doing, hon?" Hugh had come up behind her, falling

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easily into the role of hearty American tourist. "Won enough to pay our hotel bill?"

"I'm afraid not." Selena pointed to her few remaining chips. At the end of the table two men had moved into the space left by the Spaniards. One was Japanese, the other the rebel leader whose picture she had seen. Cactus. The Japanese bought a hundred chips and put five on each of the numbered corners. The bearded man bought only ten and put one on the number nearest him. While most eyes followed the spinning wheel, Cactus, like Selena, studied the placement of the other players' chips. He lost, played the same number again. This time the ball stopped on 27. UCLA exclaimed "Bingo!" and the croupier pushed thirty five chips toward him. Gathering them up, he beamed at the other players as if expecting them to share his joy. Only Selena smiled back as he left the table to cash them in.

She lost her last chips on the next two spins of the wheel. "I'm wiped out," she told Hugh. "Let's go."

"I'll stake you if you want to keep on playing."

"No, I've had enough."

"You're sure?" His tone was doubtful.

"Positive."

"O.K., if you say so." He accepted her decision with reluctance and moved with her toward the door. His frown lifted when he reached the lobby and, looking back, saw the bearded man come out of the casino and head for the elevator.

"Shall we take a walk?" Selena suggested.

When they were once more in the open air, Hugh tucked her hand inside his arm and they walked at a brisk pace.

"Evidently you guessed right," he conceded. "But that quick passage of information is at odds with all we were told. California played his seven and twenty-seven, then left a few minutes after Cactus came in. So he must have recognized him. And in that case—well, no matter. The important thing is, we know the date—July twenty-seventh—and we'll have to move fast to get our people in place before then."

"Not that fast," she countered. "The shipment isn't due until August eleventh."

"How do you figure that?"

"The young man left because his number finally came up. He wasn't the contact. It was the woman in gray."

"I watched her too," he returned. "She was dropping chips all over

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the board. It's true she had eight and eleven in combination once while Cactus was watching. But she also played eight and nine, seven and thirty-one, and eight and fifteen. So how could you—or Cactus, for that matter—settle on August eleventh as the significant date?"

"You weren't there long enough to catch her pattern," Selena explained. "Most of the time she played black and with it a variety of other numbers. But every fifth or sixth spin she put a chip on red and the numbers with it were always eight and eleven. Cactus didn't have to spend much time at the table, didn't even have to know who the contact was. Red was the key and as soon as he saw her play it twice with the same two numbers, he had his answer."

"A red-letter date," Hugh summed up. "So we have two weeks' lead time. Let's go back to the hotel and I'll put out the word. Then we can have a leisurely dinner and make it a real holiday."

Reversing direction, they almost collided with the young man in the UCLA shirt.

"My fault," he apologized. "Hey, I saw you in the casino. You're American, aren't you?"

"We are," Hugh agreed. "And you must be from California."

"I'll be glad to get back there too. I take off early in the morning."

"Then you'll be home for your birthday," Selena said.

"Hey, you some kind of detective?" He stared at her. "How'd you know? — Oh, sure, you saw me playing seven and twenty-seven. It paid off for me too." He patted his pocket. "Maybe next time you'll be lucky."

## DETECTIVERSE

### *Q. AND A.*

*by RILEY HUGHES*

The slightest fragment of a clue
Is all this bane of spies will need
To queue them up to answer Q.
No question she's Selena Mead!

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*When Jared Jimson built the pile of stones at the turn of the century he said, "It will remain to be seen." And so it had, to help the new owner of "the Jimson Place" solve a crime many decades old . . .*

# JIMSON'S FOLLY

**by T. M. McDADE**

It always annoys me to hear people refer to our farm as the Jimson Place when my uncle, Warren McCandless, bought the farm all of fifty years ago. That was partly due to the Folly, but the "locals" are generally a family or two behind on names. My neighbor Todd's place is still called Hansen's although Hansen's been dead for thirty years. I inherited the farm more than a dozen years ago. It was my escape from the city, and for me it has always been the McCandless farm.

I had mixed feelings when Bob Lowe came to inquire about the folly. The Bicentennial had stirred up the local historical societies to write histories of the communites and to identify points of historical interest. Lowe was the mover and shaker of our town historical society and when he asked about Jimson's Folly I realized what a paucity of famous or wondrous sites there were in the town of Millville.

The town does have a cave of modest depth, a boulder of some several tons which once rocked at the slightest touch but which is now immobile, and a mounted anvil on the village green to commemorate the one-year residence of a forgettable character of the Nineteenth Century referred to as the Learned Blacksmith. To this company Lowe had added the Folly which stood just behind our orchard and which, though neither artistic nor historic, had acquired a local fame as something "curious".

Those who were inclined to denigrate it called it "just a pile of stones". And so in truth it was. But when Jared Jimson built it about the turn of the century he said he was building a pyramid,

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which indeed he did, dragging great boulders from the many stone walls that wandered through woods and fields as testimony to the efforts of countless farmers to clear the fields for planting.

The four sides of the pile, each twelve feet long, rose in a gentle slope that reached a point about ten feet high. In the center he had placed a cut stone plinth or stele that gave it a more formal touch than the flat rough stones that made up the body of the work. What it lacked in elegance, it made up in mass, and almost everyone who saw it for the first time would conjecture on what might be buried in it.

"Tell me about it," said Lowe.

"*Me* tell *you?* I know practically nothing about it. I thought you would know."

"The only story I ever heard was that Jimson, who worked the farm most of his life, felt there ought to be some physical sign on the place that he'd lived there as there was very little else there that was permanent. But that might be just someone's conjecture. Why don't you ask around and write a little item on the Folly so we can include it with other local curiosities for the Bicentennial celebrations."

That was how I began to call on some of the older residents with a tape recorder to ask about the building of the Folly and other local history. "Pa" Hall was the third town ancient I called on and he was more helpful than his predecessors. Nearing ninety, he at least could tell me something about the Folly's creator.

"Jared Jimson!" he said. "What a fraud! He had more ways of stealing a dollar than the devil. And more words. What a talker! He traveled in medicine shows, I heard, before he came to Millville. He sold that fake Kickapoo Indian medicine. Did magic tricks to collect a crowd—made things disappear. After the medicine show busted up he became an auctioneer. Settled down here and bought the farm—that place of yours."

I asked about the Folly.

"Oh, that," he said. "I never could figure out what the heck Jimson was up to. That was just about the time that Si Flicker disappeared, and while half the town was searching the fields and woods for Si, Jimson had that team of his dragging stones to build that—pyramid, he called it. I thought he was a little touched about that." Pa chomped on his gums.

A silent alarm bell sounded in my head. "You say Si Flicker disappeared. What happened to him?"

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The question brought a snort from the old man. "Just like I told ya—he disappeared. Never did find him. But then, that was no loss. Flicker was the most contentious man God ever made. Fought with everybody—words, fists, law suits. Those who wouldn't fight him, he sued. A crowd nearly lynched him once when he tried to close a right-of-way folks had been using for years. Us kids were really scared of him. He had pale-blue eyes, but they didn't rightly move together so when he stared at you one seemed to bore into you while the other kept looking off over your shoulder. People said one was a fake, but we were never sure which one was the good one."

"You mean he just never showed up again?" This seemed unlikely—there are very few people who actually disappear.

"That's what I mean. Sheriff looked high and low for him. Most people figured he ran off to beat his creditors, but that didn't make much sense. He just wouldn't have paid them. If I remember rightly the sheriff even pawed around Jimson's Folly, thinking he might be there, but nothing come of it. Jimson went right on building it, darned fool."

I thanked the old man and took off to ponder what I had learned. Something he had said, a passing reference, still eluded me. I felt I had missed a connection.

When I was next in town I visited the public library and addressed myself to the newspapers of the period. The disappearance of Si Flicker had given me a date, but that event was given the briefest mention. A neighbor, Jared Jimson, had heard Flicker's cows calling when they hadn't been milked. Flicker lived on the farm adjoining Jimson. Search parties in the woods of his farm disclosed nothing. Was there any significance in the two being neighbors? Just as I was turning the last page of the old newspaper a name in an ad caught my eyes.

JIMSON'S FARM
SMOKED HAMS, BACON, AND OTHER MEATS

I wasn't sure how far I wanted to go about getting the story of the Folly. I did not want to encourage people to come to the farm and find them scrambling all over the place. As a city dweller who had lived most of my life in apartments, I had an exaggerated sense of the privacy of the landowner. But simple curiosity nudged me on. I thought of one more place to look.

Down at the town hall I asked for the Sheriff. I've learned to ask for the man at the top and, besides, being an elected official he would always be interested in meeting a voter. He had never heard of

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Jimson or Flicker, but I told the story so as to make it part of the Bicentennial show and he said he would help me if I'd tell him what to do. Records on Flicker's disappearance? Well, I could try, he said, but they didn't keep many records in the old days—which I suspect Sheriff Ormsbee meant any period before his own.

I soon found myself in the hands of Polly, the chief clerk, who I'm sure was popular with the deputies. Down in the basement in a screened wire cage she waved at a row of file cabinets.

"If we have anything on that time, it will be in one of those drawers," she said, whereupon she left me on my own, which was just what I had hoped for. Even if I found nothing on Flicker, I'm nosy by disposition. In all those old files there might be many good stories.

Turning first to the daily calendar books, I looked up the date of Flicker's disappearance and it gave me some satisfaction to see the entry of the first report in the daily blotter:

"J. Jameson [sic] reported to C. Strum, dep.—Si Flicker a neighbor missing from his farm."

A fine start, but entries for the following days added little to the story. Searches here, interviews there, but no details, just informal entries. There ought, I thought, to be a file on the case somewhere. I turned over more paper. Gun permits, dog licenses, fishing licenses, a list of honorary deputies—then finally an alphabetical file of folders. Beating off the dust of years, I finally came on one with the name Flicker on the tab.

The very thin file was hardly promising, but one document suggested importance. The legend on the cover excited my interest: *Suppressed Search Warrant.* I moved with the file nearer to the light, a naked bulb hanging from a ceiling cable. The first sheet was a warrant signed by Lee Barnes, Magistrate, citing the accompanying affidavit as containing allegations that supported the search warrant he was issuing for the house, barns, outbuildings, fields, and appurtenances of Jared Jimson for evidence related to the disappearance of Silas Flicker. At the request of the sheriff no publication was made of the issuance of the warrant except to serve a copy on the said Jared Jimson.

I turned over the affidavit. It was signed by the then Sheriff Herb Packard, who recited in it the disappearance of Flicker and the fact that on the day before Jimson had reported him missing, Jimson had had a violent quarrel with Flicker, who seemed determined to provoke a fight with Jimson. Homer Stanley, who was a witness to

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the quarrel, said that Flicker made several threats, called Jimson names which Stanley did not care to repeat, and as Flicker left he said he would see Jimson the next day and settle the matter. At the general store the next morning, Flicker told Lee Barnes he was on his way to see Jimson.

From the evidence the sheriff then had it was clear that Flicker had tackled Jimson the next day and there was some suspicion that he had been killed in the heat of the argument, but in the absence of a body there was nothing the sheriff could do. His search had turned up nothing, and lacking direct evidence that Flicker was dead he couldn't proceed against Jimson.

I now had a lot more to chew on, and I was careful to stop by to thank Polly for her help and careful to say nothing of what I'd found as well.

When I reached the farm, the telephone was ringing.

"Hello, Mr. McCandless—this is Fred Braizie. We met at the last historical society meeting." I said I recalled him. "Bob Lowe told me you were going to write something about Jimson's Folly. I've always been suspicious of that thing," he said. "Maybe now is the time to find out what's really in it."

"Mr. Braizie," I said, "what makes you think there is anything in it?"

"Well, that's been the talk around here for years. Why else would he build it? And didn't them Egyptians bury things in the pyramids? I can get Bill Higgins with his big tractor and some men from the road-repair gang." I thanked him and said I'd think about it, but as far as I knew it was filled with stone and nothing else.

I spent the next few days walking the farm, refreshing my recollection of the fields, the woods, the pond, and the far corners of its hundred acres. The ice house was gone, a stone foundation its only reminder. The cement slab of a small shed testified to another loss, but the horse and the cow barns framed over a century ago in solid chestnut remained to speak of another time.

I tried to make some sense out of the few scraps of information I'd come by. So much of it didn't make any sense. Had the Sheriff any other information against Jimson? Why had Jimson built the Folly? And more importantly, why did he persist in building it while the search for Flicker was going on? It didn't fit his character—at least as I imagined it to be. I got out the tape I had made of my talk with Pa Hall and listened again to his recollections of Jimson.

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And, listening, I was struck by the thing he had said that had eluded me after the interview. I reversed the tape and listened again.

"He traveled in medicine shows, I heard, before he came to Millville," Hall said in his Yankee voice. "He sold that fake Kickapoo Indian medicine. Did magic tricks to collect a crowd—made things disappear—"

That was it! Jimson had been a magician! How unexpected in this old farmer. And of course the Folly was an illusion—perhaps Jimson's greatest. If he had killed Flicker in a dispute he had to draw attention away from—what? The place where he had killed him or where he had hidden the body? While Jimson was building the pyramid, under the eyes of the Sheriff's men, they saw only what Jimson wanted them to see. They searched it and found nothing—as they were expected to do. Who could look at that pile of stones and not imagine that something must be hidden there? Or else why build it?

But while this could explain the Folly, it didn't tell me anything about Flicker's disappearance. If my assumption about the Folly was correct, there had to be someplace nearby that might shed light on the mystery. But the farm had been in our family for nearly fifty years and surely something would have been found if it had been there. Mentally I ticked off the barns and outbuildings, trying to imagine where I might look. I had just conjured up a picture of the old ice house when a thought struck me. The smoke house! But there *was* no smoke house—not in my time anyway. I put in a call to Pa Hall.

"Jimson's smoke house," he said. "It warn't much. Really no bigger than an outhouse. Stood just on the west side of the pond where Jimson cut his ice. I will say his hams were right good. He made a bit of change out of that little shed. I wondered why he never rebuilt it when it burned down."

"When did it burn down?"

"Can't rightly say for sure. Seems like about the same time he was building the Folly, but I'm not sure. Smoke houses were always burning down. No one would insure one."

It being still daylight, I walked to the pond and looked for the site of the smoke house. In the high grass I found the rough stone perimeter of a foundation wall outlining a small rectangle. My curiosity pushed me on and I began to turn the packed earth with a three-tined fork. Almost immediately I was into the detritus of the fire: fragments of charred wood and nails.

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With increasing reluctance I continued to turn over the soil. I was about to stop when I saw a mud-covered object—my attention attracted by its regular shape. I picked it up and with my fingers wiped the soil from it. It was smooth as a marble, and as I turned it in my hands I found myself being stared at by a pale-blue glass eye. I was so startled I dropped it as though it had burned my hands. It fell at my feet and from there stared up at me. Panic seized me and with a yell I snatched it up and hurled it into the pond. Then, trembling, I smoothed the place where I had dug and hurried back to the house.

What was I doing? The last thing I wanted to find out was what I had been looking for—evidence of murder. Where would my peace and quiet go if the case was reopened? No, the quicker I satisfied Lowe, the sooner the subject would be forgotten. Without hesitating, I turned my mind to writing the piece he wanted for the Bicentennial.

Before preparing dinner I had written:

"On the McCandless Farm on Brush Hill there is a cairn of stones erected about the turn of the century known as Jimson's Folly. Named after the farmer who built it, the stone pile in the form of a pyramid is twelve feet square at the base and about ten feet high at its peak. According to legend, Jimson felt that despite all the years of his toil on the farm, a short time after his death there would be little sign of his lifetime of labor. He erected the stone pile as a kind of memorial to himself. Of it he said, 'It will remain to be seen.'

"He was right."

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

# CRIME BEAT

**by R. E. PORTER**

*FAMOUS FIRSTS:* At a time when some American firms are choosing to publish mysteries as straight novels rather than in their traditional genre categories, the British publishing firm of Collins still celebrates the joys of the mystery with marketing ideas designed to attract new readers. Collins recently published a handsome series of twelve hardcover reprints under the general title of Famous Firsts—the first published novels of a dozen popular mystery writers. Included are books by Catherine Aird, Gavin Black, Nicholas Blake, Dominic Devine, Elizabeth Ferrars, Joan Fleming, Andrew Garve, H. R. F. Keating, Michael Kenyon, Ross Macdonald, Ngaio Marsh, and Patricia Moyes. (Ross Macdonald's book was *Blue City,* his third novel but the first to be published in England.)

The results makes for some surprising and delightful reading. I had never before read Nicholas Blake's *A Question of Proof* (1935), for example, in which the second murder is committed with a quite ingenious weapon which seems to vanish from the scene after use. Let's hope some American publisher compiles its own list of Famous Firsts!

*SWEDISH LOCKED ROOMS:* Often called the "Swedish John Dickson Carr," Jan Ekstrom is one of the best current mystery writers in Sweden. His writing career spans some twenty years and includes a number of award-winning books —yet until now his novels have never been translated into English. Happily, that situation will be remedied when Scribners publishes Ekstrom's *Deadly Reunion* here in January. It's a locked-room mystery featuring Ekstrom's series sleuth, Inspector Bertil Durell. Scribners plans to follow this American debut with other Jan Ekstrom books about Durell. The best of these, according to Swedish critics, are *The Wooden Overcoat* (1963), *The Blackamoors* (1964), *The Eel-Trap* (1967), *The Fire Dance* (1970), *The Precipice* (1975), and *The Man in the Mountain* (1979).

*TV MYSTERIES:* The British syndicated series *Tales of the Unexpected* begins its fourth televi-



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sion season in most cities this fall with stories by a number of familiar names: Robert L. Fish, C. B. Gilford, Talmage Powell, Ruth Rendell, Jack Ritchie, and Henry Slesar. Most are adapted from stories first published in *EQMM* or *AHMM*, and this year they star such well known actors as Edward Albert, Samantha Eggar, Darrin McGavin, George Peppard, and Tom Smothers, with John Houseman again acting as host.

*TIBETAN THRILLER:* One of this year's more unlikely thrillers was published recently by Houghton Mifflin. Titled *The Power of Nothingness*, it's a collaboration between a remarkable Frenchwoman, Alexandra David-Neel, who died in 1966 at the age of 100, and the young Lama Yongdon, who became her adopted son. Recently rediscovered and translated into English for the first time by *EQMM* contributor Janwillem van de Wetering, the book tells of a Lama's servant who pursues his master's murderer across Tibet and China.

*PAPERBACK OMNIBUSES:* Something new is coming from Penguin Books—Penguin Crime Omnibuses, consisting of several books in one volume by one author. The series was launched here this summer with *The Complete Father Brown*, though Sherlock Holmes and Poe volumes previously appeared in England. Still to come are omnibuses devoted to the novels of Margery Allingham, Georges Simenon, Patricia Highsmith, and Edmund Crispin.

*COMING ATTRACTIONS:* Edgar-winning novelist Ken Follett, who was a journalist before turning to crime fiction, has completed his first solo non-fiction book, *The Bull and the Peacock*, about the dramatic rescue of some engineers trapped in Iran when the Shah was ousted. Morrow will publish it early next year. *The Skull Beneath the Skin* by P. D. James, coming from Scribners this month, is the second case for female private detective Cordelia Gray, introduced ten years ago in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*.

Martin Cruz Smith's first novel since the award-winning *Gorky Park* is due next year from Random House. It's titled *Stallion's Gate* and concerns the making of the atom bomb. The fourth of Antonia Fraser's Jemima Shore mysteries, *Cool Repentance*, will be published this fall by Norton. The BBC has acquired TV rights to the series.

Best-selling British author Desmond Bagley has a new American publisher. Summit Books will issue his latest novel, *Windfall*, on its autumn list, with *Bahama Crisis* to follow in 1983.

John Le Carré has completed a new novel. Look for it next year. Two more Scribner Crime Classics are due in October: *The Devil's Steps* by Arthur W. Upfield and *The Lacquer Screen* by Robert van Gulik. Coming this fall from Bowling Green University Popular Press is an *Index to Black Mask, 1920–1951*, complied by E. R. Hagemann.

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# BLOODY VISIONS

## by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

The advent of television's cable systems has opened up wide new entertainment sources for viewers, many of them in the mystery arena. Cable—which began as a way to get visual signals to distant or difficult reception areas—has expanded to other dimensions: a multitude of channels operating much like airwave-transmitted TV, with commercials to pay for programming, and pay-cable, where subscribers receive special sports, theater, or dramatic shows. One such special program, a staging by the revered Williamstown Theater, a repertory playhouse in Massachusetts, of William Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes,* presented on cable by Home Box Office recently (as reported in these pages), was honored by the Mystery Writers of America. Cable scarcely needs the encouragement, however; its pursuit of the mystery has not been half hearted.

Quite recently, for instance, a superior production of Frederick Knott's *Wait Until Dark*—with Katharine Ross as the terrorized blind heroine—was staged especially for cable, and negotiations for the author's *Write Me a Murder* have been reported. A good many Broadway mystery plays of past years will soon have special cable editions. As well, mystery documentaries are being created exclusively for cable channels. There have already been special reports on a variety of unsolved famous murders and fascinating documentaries on spies from Mata Hari to reconnaissance pilot Francis Gary Powers. Also in the planning stages are six hours on the works and moods of Raymond Chandler, to be filmed in London with Powers Boothe (the Reverend Jones of *The Guyana Tragedy*) an interesting choice for Philip Marlowe. The series is to be called *Chandlertown.*

But the great concentration of pay-cable channels is on movies, and many of the movies are mysteries which have had little play in neighborhood theaters, due to the current perilous distribution conditions. Very recently two bizarre but interesting thrillers whose movie-house appearances were limited if screened at all, *Cardiac Arrest* (a police drama with plot similarities to *Coma*) and *Dead and Buried,* made the quick crossover to cable. These titles will undoubtably filter to regular television next year, but the versions will not be as complete.

Cable movies often bring back noteworthy but obscure mysteries which are hard to find elsewhere. Among these is Claude Chabrol's adaptation of *Ten Days' Wonder,* a moody French film with Orson Welles and Anthony Perkins which doesn't do justice to the Queen novel (Ellery himself is omitted)



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but still is fascinating. Two other crime films of recent cable exposure work better: *Pulp*, in which Michael Caine plays a hack writer with gusto, and *The Man with Bogart's Face*, a respectful parody with Robert Sacchi's private eye remarkably Spade-like.

But the revival of *older* mysteries on the cable movie channels has been the most gratifying. One can find distinguished titles like *The Inspector Calls* and other hard-to-view imports from Britain, but the real gems go much further back, with less of a current popular following—finds which the crime-film buff might have despaired of seeing. Where else can one unearth Fay Wray in *The Greenwich Village Murders*, one of many "B" whodunits from the early Thirties finding new life on the movie multi-channels. How pleasurable it is to see Ginger Rogers in *One Frightened Night*, an old-dark-house thriller from 1935 in which she is stalked by a mad masked killer who uses electricity to eliminate heirs to an estate. Or 1933's *Crime of the Century*, which at the climax features a ticking clock giving *you* time to guess the murderer.

William Powell can be seen again as Philo Vance in the unrivaled *Kennel Murder Case*, while Chan, the Saint, and the Falcon all detect once more with the old vigor. These vaults rarely open these days for commerical television, but on the cable channels—proliferating daily—the cinematic melodramas of the Crime Club or the Inner Sanctum and a growing treasury of mysteries one surely thought lost forever unreel to delight anew.

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# INTERVIEW: JEFFRY SCOTT (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

*EQMN:* Have your experiences as a newspaperman helped you in writing fiction?

*SCOTT:* The *Daily Mail* has sent me to quite a few strange places—to Panama to interview the deposed Shah of Iran, to Guyana after the dreadful cult suicide-orgy of Jonestown, to Switzerland, where the shy money hides, to Africa, where some of it is made, and so forth. "It's all good color," my father would chant as a battle cry when getting an assignment from his paper. True.

*EQMN:* Tell us about your freelance writing.

*SCOTT:* Although I've had a measure of acceptance for everything from romance to science-fiction and ghost stories, crime writing is my main thing—about 150 published stories, I think, though I've lost count. Not to mention an archive of pulp magazines in a tea-



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chest that vanished into one of those Black Holes in the garage.

I'm guilty of a hardback thriller, *Trust Them and Die,* and TV and radio plays as well as short stories. The best thing for me has been *The Graveyard Companion* [Elsevier/Nelson Books, $8.95], a horror-tales collection—six by me and six by my father, Gray Usher. (My real name is Shaun Usher. Jeffry Scott is a pseudonym.)

My father is the nicest and most admirable guy I know, and most sons want to work with their fathers at some time in their lives, I guess. When any pleasant male character walks into my work, you can be sure Gray is standing beside him, blinking and puffing his pipe and nodding approvingly from time to time.

*EQMN:* I'ts an old question but it must be asked of you. How do you find the time to write freelance along with a demanding full-time job?

*SCOTT:* One always finds time for love affairs or obessions. My father wrote a paperback gangster book a month in the 1950s amid a full-time job, manifold hobbies, and running a house while my mother was working as a nurse out of town. It never occurred to me that "the writer" has to have enormous time at set periods. I assumed that if Pop did it, I could.

Not knowing any better can be a priceless gift.

*EQMN:* Do you enjoy writing?

*SCOTT:* I love it. Witnessing very good actors actually saying what I've imagined is about the best fun I've had while fully dressed.

"Don't talk it, write it" is a Fleet Street cliché with a lot of sense in it, and I'm superstitious over talking about what happens between a scrap of dialogue entering my head and a story coming out on paper. There's a badly defined but strong feeling that if you start stripping down and studying the mental-emotional machinery between your ears it may never work properly, if at all, again.

Both my parents are writers and they instilled that idea. It has left me with an abiding sense of enjoying, Lord knows why or how, a blessing. Because even mediocre writers who will be forgotten a generation from now, or sooner, do work a sort of magic. If nobody reads them, that's still fine: they have constructed little worlds out of thin air and put them into orbit for a moment or so.

*EQMN:* What's your life away from the typewriter?

*SCOTT:* Well, I suppose because I'm a storyteller I'm a menace at dinner parties—I've got a long memory, strong on embroidering the past, and very bad at keeping my trap shut. I don't really drink too much but love the taste of white wine and getting silly and falling over on my side.

I have one son, Peter Magnus, whose first short story was published when he was rising thirteen—about, as he seldom tires of stating, a decade before I managed it. I'm married to a wife and a reconditioned IBM golfball typewriter, though not always in that order. Which can make domestic life interesting, as they say.



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# THE JURY BOX

**by JON L. BREEN**

Both of this month's top pair qualify as first mystery novels, but their authors bring considerable experience to the task. One is an actress-playwright who has written a previous novel outside the crime genre, and the other is a highly regarded short-story writer who has honed his craft in this magazine and others. Each author does something unusual with the mystery novel, and they have in common considerable insight into character.

**** Mary Gallagher: *Quicksilver,* Putnam, $12.95. This is undeniably romantic suspense but a highly unconventional example of the type, starting with the male-viewpoint character, a young lawyer who falls in love with a fast-rising New York fashion model. The mystery of her deadly past is constantly tantalizing and satisfactorily worked out, and the contrasting backgrounds of glossy Manhattan and small-town Wisconsin are vividly depicted. Most important, this is a beautifully written book. Among mystery writers, the closest stylistic comparison would be Cornell Woolrich.

**** Ernest Savage: *Two If by Sea,* Scribners, $12.95. Readers of Savage's *EQMM* stories won't be surprised at the excellence of his book-length debut. It takes place on a twelve-passenger freighter traveling between Genoa and Los Angeles, and its protagonist is a man bent on revenge for the hit-run killing of his wife and daughter. The plot has some fine twists, but the author's way with people is the key to this involving and unpredictable novel's success.

*** Ken Follett: *The Man from St. Petersburg,* Morrow, $14.50. As in his classic *The Eye of the Needle,* Follett masterfully brings another time to life, in this case the days before the outbreak of World War II in London. Indeed the background saves the day—the plot structure resembles a cross between "Upstairs, Downstairs" and a Roadrunner cartoon. Special treat for long-memoried mystery buffs: the police sleuth of the tale is Basil Thomson, a real-life Scotland Yard man who later became a detective novelist. Winston Churchill is another historical figure in the cast.

*** William L. DeAndrea: *Five O'Clock Lightning,* St. Martin's, $11.95. A red-baiting congressman is murdered in Yankee Stadium in this historical novel of the early Fifties. DeAndrea chooses his period details well, and though the killer's identity is not really in doubt there is a kernel of tricky puzzle-plotting here as well.

*** Thomas Chastain: *Nightscape,* Atheneum, $10.95. The central situation—a band of wild children roaming Central Park and sought by the mother of a girl they may have shanghaied—sounds too much like a lot of recent horror



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novels to be promising. But Chastain's mastery of pace and ability to present a vivid Manhattan background make this suspense novel compelling reading. The shock ending doesn't quite work.

*** Ellis Peters: *The Leper of St. Giles,* Morrow, $11.95. This one ranks about third among Brother Cadfael's five adventures to date. Again there is humor, romance, a good medieval background, and some sound detection.

*** Joseph Hansen: *Gravedigger,* Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, $12.50. The homosexual milieu of the novels about insurance investigator Dave Brandstetter undoubtedly gains Hansen some readers and loses him others. Those in the latter camp—no pun intended—are missing as near an approximation in style and plotting skill to Ross Macdonald as anyone is now attaining.

*** Douglas Clark: *The Gimmel Flask,* Dell/Murder Ink, $2.25. Clark's novels about Scotland Yard's Masters and Green are agreeable stylistic throwbacks to the days of John Rhode and Freeman Wills Crofts. The choice of killer in this one bends the basic rule a bit. Strong attributes here are the author's expert knowledge of pharmaceuticals and (as in so many recent mysteries) a background of the antique business.

*** Peter Turnbull: *Deep and Crisp and Even,* St. Martin's, $10.95. Here is a strong Glasgow-based procedural in the vein of Ed McBain. The cops-hunt-psycho tale has become nearly as standardized as the snowbound house party, but Turnbull covers the familiar ground with great skill.

** Max Collins: *Scratch Fever,* Pinnacle, $1.95. All Collins' novels have a smooth readability, but this sixth in the series about semi-retired crook Nolan and his comics-collecting sidekick Jon has a thinner plot than usual. Best feature is a vivid background of rock music, a world the author knows very well.

** Mignon Warner: *Death in Time,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $10.95. The latest novel about clairvoyant Edwina Charles is well written and has some nice plot and character touches but ultimately disappoints. Fans of Clayton Rawson and Walter B. Gibson will regret how little Warner does with the promising background of a magicians' convention in Wales, and for once the long-winded closing exposition did not delight this enthusiast of talkative windups.

** David E. Fisher: *Katie's Terror,* Morrow, $12.50. The pure cat-and-mouse suspense novel is probably the toughest kind of crime novel to do really well. This tale of a New York librarian (and amateur detective) menaced by a serial killer is smoothly written and professional but all too predictable in its development. (Am I alone in thinking the crime-solving psychic is becoming the most tiresome stock character in mystery fiction?)

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*MINITHRILLER*

*by NIGEL MORLAND*

CHAPTER 1

All ringed and bangled,
At him she angled,
With ways new-fangled.

CHAPTER 2

But then they wrangled.

CHAPTER 3

Her throat he mangled.

CHAPTER 4

The headlines jangled.

CHAPTER 5

The Court untangled . . .

CHAPTER 6

. . . the killer dangled.

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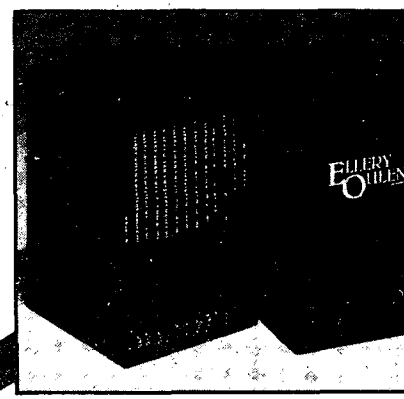


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a *NEW* Athalia Goode story by

**RALEIGH BOND**

*A not-so-funny thing happened to Byron Goode while he wa dropping off a case of Chateau Petrus 1978 to the wine locker h and Athalia rent in North Hollywood. Lucky for him that Athali is such a persistent detective—and that he is not only the onl husband she's got but the only one she wants . . .*

# THE LOCKER-ROOM MYSTERY

***by RALEIGH BOND***

I didn't blame the guy behind me for honking angrily while my c crawled toward the green traffic light, but I wasn't taking a chances of having to stop short. Not with what I had on the fro seat.

What it was was a case of Chateau Petrus 1978 my wife anc had just purchased from our wine merchant. Both our business were doing well. My latest book was selling and Athalia's solvi of a forgery case had netted her one-woman organization a handsor fee. So we had sprung for an addition to one of our common passio We don't have a great wine collection but it's substantial enou for us to rent a wine locker.

It was in a building called Bacchus's Basement, a typical L Angeles name for an establishment taking advantage of Los A geles' typical lack of cellars. It was located in a fairly rough part North Hollywood but gained security from the fact that a poli station was right next door. As I drove up to the one-story structu I paused to make way for a departing blue Chevy before parki next to a yellow Cutlass, the only car in the small private lot lugged the heavy crate through the door into the small recepti room where Harold sat watching me.

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Harold is in his sixties, a thin, slightly balding man usually dressed in a ratty sweater. I can't describe the rest of his attire because in the six weeks we've had the locker I only saw him get up from behind his desk once, and that was to take Polaroids of Athalia and me for our file cards. He kept them with portraits of the other renters in a filing cabinet next to his desk. Before him was the sign-in book where you have to inscribe your signature before being allowed to enter the hallowed inner confines.

"Got something good today, Mr. Goode?" he asked and snickered in delight at his word-play.

I set the crate on a nearby table. "Chateau Petrus."

He grunted with forced interest. The last thing Harold really wanted to talk about was wine. Like a night watchman in a jewelry store who couldn't tell a ruby from a rhinestone, the weather and his low wages were his main topics of conversation.

"Not too busy today," I commented as I entered my arrival time next to my signature.

"Oh, people have been coming in and out all morning. It's Friday, so they want their weekend wine. Too bad we're not open on weekends, but hell, they don't pay me enough for five days' work, much less—"

I gently reminded him that I was once again holding the heavy crate, so he begrudgingly pressed the buzzer under his desk that opened the entrance door and the lockers and I put my shoulder to the door and backed in. The lockers are about twelve feet high, three feet wide and arranged in five rows of fifty yards depth. The huge room was a marked contrast to the reception room because it was kept at a constant fifty-five degrees.

For a moment I debated if I should use the iron dolly next to the entrance door. Our locker is located in the fifth row, which is the farthest away. It was added only recently. I decided to heft the crate as an atonement for the rich and sinful pleasure the wine would someday give me. And because we intended to keep the crate nailed for years, I wouldn't need the hammer that usually hung from the side of the dolly either.

There are padlocks on the lockers on each side of the fifth, or "E", aisle, supplied by the customers themselves, and through the two-inch spaces between the door boards I could see cases and individual bottles peering out at me. Once I had put away our bounty and relocked the door I was seized with a devilish curiosity to learn what was in the one directly across from ours. I peered at the bottom shelf,

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which stretched about three feet from the floor. It took a minute for my eyes to adjust to the dim light—and for my brain to realize I was staring at the soles of two shoes. Squinting harder into the parallel opening, I saw the top of a man's head.

The news of what I'd seen so intrigued Harold he actually rose from his desk, rebuzzed the entrance door open, and led me back inside. He darted a look down each aisle before we reached the locker opposite mine and faced me with a puzzled and growingly fearful expression.

"Where's Mr. Carko? I let him in this morning. This is his locker."

"He's either in it or subletting," I said.

One thing about being next to a police station is that you can step outside and hail a cop as easily as you might a cab in New York. Two of them were lounging by a squad car and came at Harold's bidding.

After the lock had been snipped off and the door opened, what tumbled out was not Five Puttonyos Tokay. It was a slender man in his forties, wearing a blue blazer, white shirt, red tie, and grey chinos. There was about five hundred dollars in cash in his pockets, along with keys, a handkerchief, and a wallet. The picture on his driver's license showed him in a brown turtleneck sweater and corduroy jacket and his signature identified him as Sheldon Carko.

"He's been here most of the morning," Harold told the police when we adjourned to the normal temperature of the reception room. By now the place was crawling with uniformed and plainclothes policemen. "Lots of them go in there and stay a while, counting their bottles, fixing inventory lists, or just gloating over the stuff. It's like a disease. I didn't think anything of his being in there so long." He rifled through his filing cabinet and took out a card. "He's been with us two months. See?"

I craned over a blue shoulder for another look at a genuine Sheldon Carko photograph. This time he was wearing a sport shirt and a pair of dark glasses that gave him a somewhat menacing look. For some reason, the Department of Motor Vehicles insists on an inane smile, probably to cheer the traffic cop while he writes you a ticket, but Harold wasn't so demanding. Carko's downturned mouth with its cruel twist was probably more indicative of his personality.

One of the cops came in from the locker room with a hammer carefully held by a pair of tongs. There was a smear of blood on its head. "This was in the locker," he announced.

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"It's the one from the dolly," Harold told them. He turned a look n my direction. "You must have seen it there, Mr. Goode."

The cops had been eyeing me suspiciously since they arrived and ıow they decided I should answer Harold's implication next door in he station.

Despite Harold's protests that he had to keep the place open for he desperate oenophiles whose thirst would demand quenching on he weekend, we were both hustled into separate interrogation ooms and locked up tighter than a bottle of Dom Perignon.

I was allowed one phone call and dialed home.

"Best Detective Agency."

"Athalia, it's me."

"Byron!" Her voice became alarmed. You know it's love when you an scare your wife with an unexpected phone call. "What's wrong?"

I told her the situation and her concern grew greater. "I'll be right lown. Give me time to call a cab."

"I won't leave."

There was a slight pause and then she asked, "How's the Petrus?"

It was five hours before my repetitious answers began to bother he police as much as their repetitious questions were supposed to ıail me, and I was released. Athalia was in the waiting room, and he sight of her pretty face and smartly dressed figure cheered me nore than a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon.

She took my arm and we didn't speak until we got into the car, still parked outside Bacchus's Basement. I saw the place was closed, with a cop posted at the door, and that the Cutlass was still parked n the lot—indicating, I said, that Harold was still being questioned.

"Wrong," Athalia told me. "He lives next door—they let him go a half hour ago. The car belongs to the victim."

I shrugged. "What do you think I am? A detective?"

She looked sad. "I'm afraid it doesn't take a detective to see that he cops have picked you as a better suspect than Harold. Luckily hey've also got three others."

"How do you know?"

"I found an old friend at the station who let me in on some inside nformation. There were three people besides yourself who went into hat locker room after the place was opened this morning and while Carko was there. The colder temperature affected the deterioration process and made it hard to pinpoint the time of death, so it could

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have been any one of them. He let me copy down their names and addresses, plus their sign-in times."

I settled into the driver's seat and looked at the list she handed me.

| *NAME* | *LOCKER NO.* | *IN* | *OUT* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hansford Morgan | C-66 | 9:00 AM | 9:25 AM |
| Sheldon Carko | E-74 | 9:10 AM | —— |
| Walter Gilligan | A-7 | 9:30 AM | 9:54 AM |
| Mildred Halsey | E-59 | 9:50 AM | 10:15 AM |
| Byron Goode | E-73 | 10:20 AM | —— |

"You'll notice," she went on as I started up the car, "that Morgan got there as soon as the place opened. He was there for twenty-five minutes, overlapping Carko by fifteen minutes. In fact, everyone was alone with the victim for at least fifteen minutes."

I let the engine idle for a while. "So? Did they all have a reason to kill him? Did he serve a white wine with red meat?"

"No, but just as bad. Carko was a loan shark. He had plenty of enemies, and since he didn't keep written records the police think that one of the above was a debtor who simply got tired of being bled to death. Either the murderer and Carko made an appointment to meet where they both had wine lockers or the killer came across him by coincidence. The police figure that Carko had his back turned, going over the rather expensive collection of wine in his locker when he was struck." She raised her glasses to her forehead and looked at the list. "Our first stop is Morgan's business address. It's three-thirty and I want to see them all before they go home from work."

"Wait a minute! Why are we mixing in?"

"Because there's a very good chance you might wind up in a locker at the state's expense, and you're not only the only husband I've got but the only one I want." She replaced her glasses and folded the list. "Like it or not, you are now my client."

It had finally happened. After years of keeping away from her side of the breadwinning, I was now irrevocably involved in one of her cases. Usually my participation was limited to driving her around when my schedule permitted because she refuses to take the driver's test. I've always liked to watch her in action but now I had a personal stake in it that went beyond household expenses.

"Look," I said, pulling out into the street, "I can understand Morgan doing him in, and Gilligan maybe, but even if you say he and

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the Halsey woman had an appointment he was in that locker room for forty minutes before she arrived."

"He had a coat on. I got a look at the body. I'm sure the police would have no trouble thinking they'd made the appointment at his arrival time but that since she's a woman she was late."

"Sure—" I nodded "—and Morgan, being a man, was early. It all fits."

She smiled and I returned it.

Morgan worked for a construction company where, according to the clerk who assumed we were connected with the police, who'd been there earlier, he had recently been transferred from a line job to administration. We were led into Morgan's office and left alone with him. He looked up from his desk with some annoyance. He was a tall man, dressed simply in a white shirt and slacks. In his right hand was a thin handleless teacup he didn't shift to his left—extending his limp free hand for us to shake instead. He was either left-handed or an affected ass.

"How long is this nonsense going to continue?" he asked in a supercilious tone as he refilled the cup in his right hand from a steaming teapot on a nearby warmer. "I don't know this man Carko or a thing about his death."

"But a man *is* dead," Athalia said. "I wonder if we could go over it once more."

"All right," he said wearily. "I got there early because I had to be here at ten and there was a lot to do. I'd just had some cases of burgundy shipped in from New York and I wanted to have them put away fast. It ups the value when you can swear a wine has been well kept, you know."

Athalia assured him she knew. "Burgundy's getting very scarce."

He smiled. "That's why I bought it. I don't care for wine much." He hefted the cup in his hand. "In fact, I don't drink it at all. Wine is a superb investment right now. It appreciates better than a savings account."

We both nodded.

"I dismissed the cab and waited until Harold came out of his house next door to open the place," Morgan continued. "Then I signed in and got the dolly."

"How many cartons did you have?"

"Three. That's what took so long. I had to catalog them as well."

"Did you open them?"

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"No," he answered and then paused as if considering something.

"Then you can't tell us if the hammer was still on the dolly or not."

For a moment I thought I saw a flash of fear ignite his eyes. Then he answered with a tone of apprehension. "No, I can't."

"After you were alone in the locker room, did anyone come in?"

"I remember hearing the buzzer once, but I don't know when that was. I was too intent on what I was doing."

"In order to reach the 'E' aisle from the entrance door, a person would have to pass the 'C' aisle where your locker is."

He was regarding Athalia more as a threat than an imposition now. "I'm pretty far down the row and I wasn't paying much attention. I fleetingly saw a figure pass my aisle toward the far one, but I couldn't describe him, except that he wore a blue coat."

"What happened then?"

He suddenly straightened up and began speaking in a snappish tone. "I left. Just as soon as my wine was in. I signed the book, said goodbye to Harold, and went. Now, if you don't mind—"

"Burgundy's a very expensive wine to collect, Mr. Morgan," I said. "You're lucky you can afford it."

"I make a good living, and I have no family to support." He looked at me as if that put him one up on me and sipped tea. "Besides, I sold my car recently." For a moment he sat there frowning and then looked down at the watch on his left wrist. With the same hand he picked up his pen and began scribbling on a sheet of paper. "Unless you want to charge me with a crime—"

Obviously our interview was over.

Outside in the driver's seat I searched Athalia's eyes.

"He recently sold his car. Yet he says he makes a good living. Can it be that it isn't good enough to make the exorbitant interest payments a man like Carko would charge? And if I just got promoted to a new position I certainly wouldn't want my boss to know I've been dealing with a loan shark."

"That's true," she said. "Neither would I."

I was beginning to warm to the subject. "And does it make any difference that he's left-handed? I mean, can you tell from the position of the wound if the murderer held the hammer in that hand? Of course, he could have used his right to disguise the fact—"

"Drive the car," she said softly.

"I'm just trying to save myself a fee."

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It was around five when we got to Gilligan's place of business, which turned out to be a clothing boutique that catered to the young and the color-blind. Under the purple and blue neon lights were skin-tight jeans, cowboy hats with plumes, and pre-ripped jerseys. Walter Gilligan was a portly man in his fifties, bald and ridiculous-looking in a jogging suit with an outlandish design.

"My salespeople have gone and I'm closing," he told us when we announced our errand. "Besides, the fuzz were already here."

"I'm a sort of detective too," Athalia told him delicately. "A private one." She nodded toward me. "This is my client."

"Oh?" he said, examining me. Apparently he decided to consider Athalia as a fellow businessperson who merited his sympathy for having to deal with demanding and not-too-bright customers. "Let's go to my office."

He led the way through some surrealistic sculptures to a sedate, wood-paneled room where he sat at an old-fashioned rolltop desk. "I just opened this place two weeks ago and I'm still not sure it was a good idea," he said. "The kids regard this style as nostalgia."

"What did you do before?"

"I was assistant manager at the May Company. My wife decided I should make a change."

"You've certainly succeeded."

He looked down at his attire sadly. "Well, I can't come in here looking like a bank president—it would turn everybody off." He shook his head, blushing slightly. "If my neighbors ever catch me in this get-up I'll never hear the end of it. They're very conservative. Once they got up a petition when the guy across the street grew a beard."

"Tell me, why did you go to Bacchus's Basement today?"

For a moment I saw the same guarded look that had overtaken Morgan. "Oh, I stop by every day to pick up some wine or to talk with Harold. I've had a locker there since the place opened and it's on the way home." He indicated some bottles on a nearby chair. "We're having guests tomorrow and my wife wanted some Chenin Blanc for the chicken she's serving."

"I prefer Mosel with chicken," I put in and he regarded me with a polite smile, not wanting to lose Athalia her client. "Some people do," he said tactfully.

"When you drove up to the building," Athalia continued, "did you see anyone leaving?"

"Yes. A tall man walked past my car and on down the street. I

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figured he lived in the neighborhood—he was casually dressed, just a shirt and slacks, and he didn't have a car. He sat down on the bench next to the bus stop."

"Then you went in?"

"Right. Harold buzzed me in. I got my wine and left. I couldn't have been there very long because the guy was still waiting for the bus when I left."

"You don't know Los Angeles buses," Athalia told him, remembering the times I was unavailable as a chauffeur. "As a matter of fact, the log shows you were in your locker for fourteen minutes."

He paused, either trying to recall what he had been doing for that amount of time or searching for a plausible lie. "I—well, I keep a few bottles of scotch in the locker my wife doesn't know about. She's against drinking. I sometimes take a bracer even though it's against the rules."

"Your locker number signifies it's close to the entrance door. Did you hear anything from the "E" aisle or see anyone come in while you were there?"

"The refrigeration motor makes it hard to hear anything from a distance, but I—" He shook his head. "No. No to both questions."

That was about it. Since he didn't use the dolly he couldn't tell us if he saw the hammer hanging from it, so Athalia thanked him and he led us back to the front door.

"You have a lovely shop, Mr. Gilligan," she told him before we left. "It must have taken a lot of money to get it started."

"Private investors," he said with a grim smile. "They don't want their names known because most of them are parents and would hate to see their kids dressed like this." He looked up at the sky and shook his head. "It certainly is taking a long time to get dark."

It was now past six, so we headed toward Mildred Halsey's home address, deciding she must have left work by now.

"He lied," I announced. "The Halsey woman signed in before he left, so he must have seen her come in while he was standing next to the entrance door. And anyone who prefers Chenin Blanc over a good German Reisling has got to be a murderer at heart."

She looked out at the growing darkness. "I think I'd better tell you along what lines I'm proceeding. Those inconsistencies in testimony are the very things the police are looking for. They're very good at that. I'm dealing with a much slimmer clue. Something they might even call women's intuition."

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"Is there such a thing?"

"It's a phrase used to explain that while our thinking process is identical with men's we sometimes approach a problem from a different set of values. For instance, both the police and I saw the body, but their main concern was the marks of violence. They weren't that interested in what Carko was wearing, but clothes tell a woman a great deal about a man."

"Was Carko a model of sartorial elegance?"

"No, he wasn't. Both his photographs indicate that he preferred casual attire. In fact, the shirt he was wearing when he died was like one Gilligan might sell, what they now call 'leisurewear.' There wasn't even a button or a buttonhole on his collar."

I drove in silence for a while, wondering what she was getting at. Then it hit me. "He wore a tie."

"Exactly," she said, turning to me. "I couldn't understand why any man, even the least clothes-conscious, would wear a tie with a shirt that was designed to be worn without one. Then I wondered if the tie had been put on him after he was dead—by his murderer."

"But why?"

"I have no idea," she admitted. "So I decided to work on it from another angle. Instead of *why* it was done, I'm talking to these people to see who *could* have done it. All the evidence points to the fact that the murder wasn't planned. The hammer couldn't have been counted on, and a wine locker is a public place where anyone could have come in and seen the crime. More than likely the murderer brought the tie with him and used it spontaneously, like the weapon."

We parked in front of a small, well kept house that had no lights on and no car in the driveway. Mrs. Halsey wasn't home yet. We decided to wait.

"Of course!" I said suddenly. "He *wore* it! Morgan was wearing only a shirt and pants when he left the locker. Suppose the tie and blazer they found on Carko were his." Athalia didn't seem to take my deduction with much enthusiasm. "Well, it couldn't have been Gilligan. He was wearing a jogging suit. Where would he get a tie?"

"The same place he got one every evening," she said. "From his wine locker. Remember how afraid he was that his neighbors would see him in that outfit? Yet he had to come to work in it. I'll bet he leaves his home every morning in a suit and goes to Bacchus's Basement to change. After work, he returns to the locker and puts his suit back on, but since it's been closed by the police today he can't

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do it. That's why he was waiting in his shop until it was dark. So he could sneak home without anyone seeing him."

That meant that both men could have had a tie available to put on Carko's corpse. I was going to ask why we were even bothering about Mildred Halsey when her car, the same blue Chevy I'd seen leaving the wine locker this morning, pulled into her driveway.

She was an attractive woman in her late fifties, wearing a black dress and carrying a number of shopping bundles. She gave us a friendly smile and told us she had already been interviewed by the police at work. When I offered to help her with her bundles she asked me if I'd carry in the case of expensive California wine, vintage 1961, which she had on the back seat.

Inside, the walls were covered with photographs of three children, all boys, in various stages of growth. "My brood," she explained. "Their father died when the youngest was three months, so I've had to raise them myself."

"That takes a lot of money," said Athalia.

"I've managed," she answered. "Got each one through college—except the last. He's still in. That's why I stopped off at the locker this morning—tomorrow's his birthday."

"I don't understand."

"Something their father started. Every time one of them was born we bought a case of fine wine of the same vintage as their birth-year. With the idea of giving each one the case when he reached his twenty-first birthday. The wine would have soared in price. It was a way of making sure we had something of value to pass on."

"You arrived at the wine locker ten minutes before ten," Athalia reminded her, "but you didn't leave until fifteen minutes after."

Mrs. Halsey looked in my direction and hesitated. I turned away and studied the photographs.

"There was a man there, standing in the aisle closest to the door," she told Athalia. "He was adjusting his clothes, an awful-looking jogging outfit, when I came in. And I distinctly smelled alcohol. You meet all kinds, and I thought I'd wait by my own locker and give him a chance to leave. You can't hear people going out that door all that well, so I must have been there some time."

"Your locker is in the 'E' aisle. Did you notice anything out of place?"

"No. Not a thing."

She also told us she didn't notice whether the hammer was on the dolly or not. I was wondering at this point if Athalia had noticed

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that the Halsey kids always wore formal suits when they sat for pictures, even when they were too young to tie their own ties.

"Why didn't you report him to Harold?" Athalia asked.

"Well." Mrs. Halsey shrugged. "You know how it is—nine times out of ten they look on you as a paranoid old maid. Besides, I waited so long to get this locker, I didn't want to cause any trouble. I've had to keep my wine on the back porch. Lockers are so scarce they get taken right away. I was on the waiting list for a year and only got one when they opened up the new row six weeks ago." That's when we got ours too. "So I just got my case and left," Mrs. Halsey concluded. "I was pretty late for work—I'd already stopped to buy Jonathan a couple of birthday ties and a set of cufflinks."

After that I thought there was nowhere to go but home, but Athalia said to head for Bacchus's Basement.

"I took some fish out of the freezer this morning to have for supper but we don't have a dry white in the house."

"But the locker's closed," I reminded her.

"Maybe the police will let us in. It won't hurt to ask."

I pulled into the parking lot and Athalia got out and went inside the police station. I sat going over the situation, and finally centered on who I thought was the most likely suspect. There's no use in my telling you who it was because at that very moment my wife was explaining the whole thing to the cops and proving me wrong.

"It couldn't have been Morgan," she told me the next night over the supper table. "I knew that early. There was no possibility that he could have removed his own tie and put it on Carko because he's paralyzed in his right hand."

I looked dubious. "You mean you think that just because he shook hands with his left?"

"That was just an inkling. I really began to suspect it when he poured that hot tea. The cup, which by the way he never set down, had no handle and was thin, yet he kept his hand wrapped about it when he poured in a scalding liquid and seemed to feel nothing.

"Then everything began to fit and indicate that he had recently had an accident that deprived him of the use of his hand—the scribbling he did with his left because he wasn't used to writing with it yet, the selling of his car because he now couldn't drive. And nobody said he'd been *promoted* to his new position. We were told he'd been *transferred* from manual work to a job where two hands weren't as

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important. Actually, he wasn't trying to hide his affliction—all he and the police knew was that Carko had been struck with a hammer, and that could have been done by a one-handed man. However, the only tie he could have put on Carko was a clip-on type."

"What about Gilligan?"

"He lied about seeing Mrs. Halsey because he was embarrassed to be caught dressing by her. I can imagine the kind of look she gave him. It's true he had a tie available to put on Carko, but all I had to do was have the police open his locker to see if it was missing. It wasn't. His suit and tie were there just as he had left them that morning."

"Mrs. Halsey?"

"A good lead. Raising a big family alone would have made her in need of money, and she had ties with her when she visited the locker. However, she did one thing while we were there that cleared her."

"What was that?"

"She gave me the reason why the murderer would put a tie on his victim's body. And it fit only one person."

"Harold," I said.

"She reminded me that they'd opened up the 'E' aisle six weeks ago. Yet Carko's file card said he'd had his for two months. How could that be? Obviously the file card was forged and the locker belonged to someone else. In fact, Carko didn't own a wine locker and had never been to Bacchus's Basement before.

"The police called me today and said Harold has made a full confession. For years he had watched the delight with which the patrons of the wine locker pursued wine-collecting. He called it a disease, but after a while he caught it. He took one of the new lockers and borrowed money from Carko in order to fill it. After a while he began to feel the squeeze and got desperate. Yesterday morning Carko showed up at his house and began threatening Harold for his back payments. Harold got away from him by saying he had to open the locker building, even though it was only a little after eight, but Carko followed him there.

"There Carko's threats grew to the point where Harold panicked and hit him with the hammer when his back was turned. He couldn't take the body out of the place, what with the police station next door and the cops going in and out. Yet if he left it to be discovered there the cops would wonder why a thug like Carko had come to a wine-locker establishment in the first place.

"The answer was to make it look like Carko rented a locker and

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so Harold gave him his, destroying his own file card and making one up for his victim. Unfortunately, he forgot and put the wrong date on it. He forged the signature from Carko's driver's license and propped the body up to take the Polaroid. The dark glasses should have tipped me off." She hesitated. "I don't believe anyone would take a photo for identification purposes and allow the subject to wear any obstruction on his face."

"They certainly don't allow it when you get your driver's license," I said smugly.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to resist that," she sniffed, and went on. "However, Harold had to put them on Carko because his eyes were closed and not about to open. After that, he stuffed the body into his locker and went home to wait until nine o'clock. He was hoping a lot of customers would be in to help increase the suspects, and he was lucky about Morgan arriving in time to see him reopen the place. It was while Morgan was inside loading his locker—which took so long because Morgan only had one good hand to work with—that Harold began to worry that the photo of Carko on the file card showed him dressed exactly the same way as the corpse, although it was supposed to have been taken two months ago. So he went back home, got a blazer and a tie of his own, and buzzed himself into the locker room.

"Once in the 'E' aisle, he put the coat and tie on Carko and then slipped back into the reception room without Morgan knowing. Remember that Gilligan said it was noisy from the motor and Mrs. Halsey said you can't hear people leaving the locker room. The door is buzzed only when they enter. He then signed Carko's name in the sign-in book and waited until one of the steady stream of customers—who happened to be you—found the body."

The cops had let us pick up the dry white for the fish the previous evening but I'd also grabbed a red because Athalia said she was going to serve her fabulous filet mignon with special sauce on Saturday. It was one of the Petruses.

I know I told you we weren't going to touch them, but this was a special celebration. And, of course, Athalia didn't charge me a fee. My wife does a shrewd business solving crimes, but this time she did it just for me.

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*Maybe Mr. Pritchard was right. Maybe it was wiser to keep some things hidden . . .*

# THE RIGHT THING TO DO

**by HENRY T. PARRY**

I had pulled the air hose over to the shade around the corner of Old Man Moser's gas station and was putting air into my bike tires when I overheard Ashcan Asher talking to Monk Moser while Monk was putting gas into Ashcan's pick-up. They were older guys, maybe twenty, and they didn't know I was there or they would have told me to beat it.

"—just to see if we could have a little fun with that pantywaist," Ashcan was saying. "Kinda like kids doing trick-or-treat. We thought maybe we could get into the house, see if he had some beer, maybe beat him up some, not bad, just kinda touch him up a little."

"Yeah. Yeah," Monk said. He sounded disgusted and mad and he wasn't the kind of guy who got mad easy. "I know what you wanted to do. I don't want to hear about it."

But that whole Asher family were big talkers and there was no stopping Ashcan once he got started. Lots of times he talked about stuff he'd have been better off keeping his mouth shut about.

"Well, we go out there to his house—me, Artie Harris, and Joey Riddle—and go up that long driveway. Artie and Joey hid in the bushes by the porch steps and I went up and knocked on the door. Joey made it up that I was to say I had car trouble and could I use the phone."

"That's another reason I'm glad to be leaving this town," Monk said, "a place where a bunch of bums like you and Artie and Joey Riddle think you can get away with beating up a guy because he's living alone—no witnesses, nobody to help him, but mostly because he's different. You and Artie are bad enough, but Joey Riddle is—I don't know what he is. The Army ain't much, I guess, but it's better'n here with guys like you running around loose."

"Okay, okay. But wait until you hear what happened."

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"What?" Monk said, slamming the hose nozzle into the tank of the pick-up. "The three of you beat up Lawrence Pritchard, a guy who's maybe thirty years older than you?"

"I banged on the door real loud, see. A light went on in the hall and I could hear somebody coming to the door. The door was opened a crack and Joey, who had come up behind me on the porch without me hearing him, gave it a quick kick and pushed past me into the house.

"The hall light went out, I heard Joey yell, and then out the door he comes, bent double, grabbing himself. Then some bright lights came on on the porch and all down the driveway. In the doorway was this Pritchard guy, holding a shotgun, pointing it right at my middle. Did you ever have a shotgun pointed at your stomach?"

"He should have blown your head off," Monk said. "You don't use it anyway."

"You get this hollow feeling, and at the same time your insides are squeezing tighter and tighter."

Monk didn't reply.

" 'Down on your knees,' this Pritchard guy says to Joey. Joey was practically on his knees already. 'Now crawl down the steps,' he says. 'You too.' He waves the gun at me. Joey and me, we crawled down the steps. The guy must have been crazy."

"He ain't the one who's crazy," Monk said. "Anybody who shot Joey Riddle, the town would give him a medal."

" 'Now you over there in the bushes,' Pritchard says, 'out here. On your knees.' Artie got in line beside us. 'Now crawl to the gate,' he says—and just to show he wasn't fooling he batted me above the ear with the gun barrel. We crawled down the whole driveway. If anybody fell out of line, Pritchard got him in the rear with the gun butt. At the end of the driveway he said, 'On your feet. Next time you come here you won't crawl out, you'll be carried out, tied to one of those stretchers the police use, with a blanket over your face.'

"He let us go, but I want to tell you, boy, he wasn't fooling. When I stood up I saw he had two shotgun shells tucked into his shirt collar where he could get at them real quick. And when he broke the gun open I could see both barrels were loaded. He's nuts, I tell you. Anyway, me and Artie don't ever want to tangle with him again. I ain't so sure about Joey. He acts kinda funny."

"Joey's nuts too, if you ask me," Monk said. "That'll be a dollar twelve. Four gallons."

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Ashcan started up the engine of the pick-up. "Well, so long, Monk. I'll be seeing you when you get out of the Army."

"Not me you won't," Monk said. "I ain't coming back here. Did it never occur to you, Ashcan, that Mr. Pritchard may have learned something when he was a prisoner of war?"

I always thought there was something wrong with Joey Riddle too, something mean, something not healthy. He always reminded me of a toadstool—short, with a big head and a white face and hands that never tanned. His hair was almost white too, not like old folks' hair is white but like it never had any color to start with. His eyes didn't seem to have any color at all.

I do a lot of fishing out at Keller's Dam and there were lots of mornings when Joey would be there too. I don't know what it was that made me afraid to go near him. It got so that I used to sneak up to the dam to see what side he was fishing on and then I would go to the other side. If I saw him go to the dam wall to cross, I just picked up my stuff and lit out. Unless Henny Houck happened to be there.

Henny worked for the foundry in town—the foundry used the dam water—and every so often he'd come out to the dam to do something. Henny would show me what wheel to crank to lower the water level and let the water run down the creek, what to turn to let water run into the penstock, and stuff like that. The dam wasn't very big, maybe seventy feet across, maybe ten or twelve feet deep, with a wall about fifteen feet high. It was a lonesome kind of place now that the new swimming pool had been built in town.

This Lawrence Pritchard Ashcan was talking to Monk about, I had seen him a couple of times, mostly talking to Charley McCall at the news store or driving downtown in a shiny late-model car with the top down. There was the time when I went to take this book out of the public library, *The Golden Bowl* by James Henry, or something like that. When I handed the book to old picklepuss Mrs. Raymond to check out, she handed it back to me.

"Put it back," she said. "You're too young to read a book like this."

"But I'm going to be thirteen in another ten months—" I said.

"Put it back."

When I turned to go to the shelves, I saw Mr. Lawrence Pritchard standing there, listening to the conversation. There was something out of the way, almost unpleasant, in the way he looked. His chin was wide, his upper and lower lip were longer than normal. When he spoke, and he didn't speak to many people, he smacked his lips

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as if he had just tasted something, or maybe was thinking about what he was going to say.

He was tall but his arms and legs seemed as though they should have belonged to a person even taller, sticking out at odd angles so that he reminded you of an oversized grasshopper. But even though he was big, he didn't look as though he was strong. You would never think he would threaten anyone with a shotgun, let alone three tough guys like Ashcan, Artie, and Joey.

Mr. Pritchard lived abroad for fifteen years and didn't come home until all his folks had died. Some said he lived in Paris; others said Rome. Not that there was much difference between the two places in the minds of the folks in our town. One was as bad as the other.

Now he lived in an old house up on Morgan's Hill, a big place all fancied up with scrollsaw work, with tall windows downstairs that reached down to the floor. There were bay windows on three sides and on the roof there was a cupola with a lightning rod and a horse weathervane on it. Dad said that if anyone wanted to see what kind of house rich people were building in 1880, they should study the Pritchard place.

When I was a kid we used to go trick-or-treating out at the Pritchard house on Halloween. It was scary and we'd stand at the gate, daring each other to go first. You went up a long driveway with high bushes on each side, climbed wide stone steps to a porch—I remember how our feet used to thunder on the floor—where a card table stood under a dim light-globe. On the table were boxes of chocolate bars and a sign saying *Help yourself.* On the front door was another sign that read *Please don't knock.* There wasn't a light showing anywhere inside the house but you could hear faint music. We'd grab the chocolate bars and start down the driveway, walking faster all the time, until by the time we reached the street we were running.

About a week after Mrs. Raymond wouldn't let me take out that book I got a package in the mail. In it was a copy of *The Golden Bowl* by Henry James and a note that said: "I am reluctant to agree with Mrs. Raymond, but in this case she is right. But in these matters it is better to find out for yourself." There wasn't any name but it couldn't have been anybody else but Mr. Pritchard who sent it. It sure wasn't Mrs. Raymond. Anyway, they were both right about the book. I couldn't read more than three pages because it seemed like it took forever to say something that could be said with a lot fewer

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words. Mr. Pritchard's note said I could keep the book. I couldn't see why anyone would want it.

About three weeks after I overheard Ashcan Asher talking to Monk Moser at the gas station, I was heading out to Keller's Dam early one morning to try my luck with the bass, hoping I wouldn't find Joey Riddle there.

When I passed the Pritchard house, I saw a man lying face down in the gravel of the driveway.

I hopped off my bike, ran through the gate, and tripped and went sprawling. Stretched across the drive was a trip wire. My knees and hands were cut up some but I got up and went over to the man. It was Mr. Pritchard. He had tripped over the wire but the blood and cuts on his face didn't come from gravel. Somebody had beaten him with a heavy stick or a piece of pipe. I knelt down beside him and saw that his eyes were open.

He turned his head and tried to look up at me.

"Turn me over," he said. "But try to hold my left leg straight. It's broken."

His face was a mess and there was blood all over his clothes but his voice was quiet. It had the sound of a man who had made up his mind, and lying in the gravel with a broken leg and blood drying on his face wasn't going to change it.

I kind of hauled him over. He gasped when I took hold of his leg but that was the only sound out of him.

"Who did it?" I asked him.

"Nobody did it," he said. "I just fell. I was coming home from a walk. I just fell, that's all. When I tried to stand, I couldn't. Take my keys and go up to the house and call a doctor."

I called Doc Simmons' office and then ran back and asked Mr. Pritchard what else I could do.

"Pull up that trip wire and throw it back into the bushes. I would consider it a personal favor if you didn't say anything about it. I—I had a dizzy spell and fell, that's all."

I did what he asked and stayed with him until Doc Simmons and some men from the fire company showed up. They laid Mr. Pritchard in the back of the emergency truck and took him to the hospital down in Weston. They found out that his leg wasn't broken and he was home again in two weeks. When Doc and the others asked him who did it, he just kept telling them he had fallen. There was never anything in the paper about it. I know because I watched for it,

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hoping they'd say that I was the one who found him. It was pretty clear to me, and certainly it must have been to Doc Simmons, that someone had beaten Mr. Pritchard very badly. It was also clear that Mr. Pritchard wasn't going to say anything about it.

But that didn't mean he wasn't going to do anything about it, as I found out.

One morning some time after that, I was fishing from the wall of Keller's Dam. I had just cast and my line snagged on something. I pulled on it gently because I didn't want to lose the hook. Whatever it was gave way and as I pulled I could feel it slowly coming toward me. It finally broke the surface right against the wall, a bloated bundle of clothing and white hair matted with mud. It was Joey Riddle's body and it had been under water for some time. I had seen something like it once before when divers pulled Jamey Hendershot out of a quarry hole.

But Joey Riddle hadn't drowned. You had only to see his head to know that. I didn't know what to do at first. I jumped on my bike and raced back to town, thinking I ought to go and get Doc Simmons. Then I thought maybe I should go straight to Tommy Lewis, the chief of police. But as I was heading back, I thought of something else I could do. When the thought hit me, I stopped my bike. I knew what I was going to do. And I knew what the right thing to do was. And they weren't the same things.

I went up Morgan's Hill, turned into the Pritchard's gate, and dropped my bike in front of the porch steps. The front door was wide open and I could see two trunks and some traveling bags standing in the front hallway. Mr. Pritchard came from somewhere in the back when I knocked. He was dressed in a fancy shirt and brick-colored trousers, with a silk scarf tucked inside the open collar of his shirt. Nobody in our town ever dressed like that.

"Mr. Pritchard—" I had gone over what I wanted to tell him because I had to get it just right "—Mr. Pritchard, I go fishing a lot out to Keller's Dam. I've watched Henny Houck from the foundry mess around with the water level of the dam."

He didn't say anything, just waited. He didn't even act too interested.

"The dam is low now because it's the end of summer. There's a wheel you turn that lifts the sluice gate and lets the water flow downstream. Level with the sluice gate but over to one side there's

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an outlet pipe, maybe three or four feet across, that carries water to the penstock."

"What's a penstock?"

"It's like a concrete box, maybe about as big as a small house, that holds the water the foundry's going to use. It stands about twenty feet away on the downstream side of the dam wall. There's another pipe that comes out of the penstock and carries water down North Main Street to the foundry. But that pipe is smaller. So if anything big should float into the penstock from the dam it couldn't float out again."

"Is there any other way into the penstock?"

"There's a little hatch in the roof. But I don't think anyone ever looks at the inside of the penstock. Anyways, Henny never told me about him having to do anything about it."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"The foundry is closed for August, Mr. Pritchard, so the penstock is empty, or nearly empty. So if somebody wanted to float a log or, or anything, out of the dam into the penstock, all he'd have to do is open the sluice gate until anything floating in the dam dropped to the level of the penstock intake pipe. Then he could crank open the penstock pipe and this log or whatever could be floated into it, maybe shoved with a pole, and it would end up in the penstock. It would be the last anybody would ever see of it. If you closed the penstock intake and cranked the sluice gate shut, the dam would fill up and nobody would ever know the difference."

"The information is interesting but why do you explain it to me? I am leaving for Europe today."

"Well, you sent me that book and even though I don't know what it's about—"

"It might be about how it's wiser to keep some things hidden."

He gave me a weak front-of-the-face grin and closed the door and that was the end of it.

As soon as I left Mr. Pritchard's house, I went down to the bridge at South First Street where the creek from the dam flows into town and crawled down the bank under the bridge. I cut a branch, made some notches in the bark, and propped it upright in the water with some stones.

I sat watching those notches for it seemed like two weeks, but finally I saw the water level of the creek go up about four or five notches and after a while drop back to where it had been and then

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drop lower. Water had been let out of the dam and now it was filling up again.

I never saw or heard of Mr. Pritchard again. Some said he went back to Paris, or maybe Rome. Nobody seemed to care much. They cared even less about Joey Riddle's disappearance. Folks seemed to think he'd gotten into some kind of trouble and had lit out. They were just as glad.

One Saturday in September Dad was packing a box of books to be sold at the church fair. I went up to my room and got *The Golden Bowl* and put it in the box. Dad picked it up, looked at it, and handed it back. "Wait," he said.

"Why?" I said. "What's it about anyway?"

Dad explained that the golden bowl had a flaw in it and that he thought it stood for the flaws in the characters of the people in the story, flaws that affected their lives. It sounded like a pretty dumb story to me, and writing a big long book about it seemed even dumber. But I could see too that there might be something in this business about flaws in character that applied to me.

I had seen the creek level rise because somebody was changing the water level in the dam, a change that would hide Joey Riddle's body, a change I had just told somebody how to make. I didn't have any doubt what had happened.

But I had seen Mr. Pritchard lying bleeding in his driveway without saying who had beaten him up, without going to the police. It made me think that there was some kind of private fight going on between him and the rest of the world, a war I didn't understand. Maybe Mr. Pritchard was right. Maybe it is wiser to keep some things hidden. But I knew what the right thing to do was and I hadn't done it. In all this I hadn't said a word to anyone about what I had seen and heard. It looked as if I had a serious flaw in my character and I was just going to have to live with it.

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# DETECTIVERSE

## *TV MYSTERY*

*by PATRICK M. VAUGHAN*

These TV sleuths all had a trick
Which viewers came to know.
It helped smooth out the rough spots
Of each weekly show.

Columbo had his raincoat, Ironside had his chair,
Kojak had his lollipop and nary any hair,
Perry had his Della, Ellery had his dad,
Nero had his orchids, Rockford rarely got mad.

Screenwriters knew just what to do
When the plot was not.
They used the hero's gimmick
To keep the rating hot.

There is a real problem here
If you take a look—
The characters are colorful
But hardly match the book.

The moral of this story,
If you're a TV dick,
Is to speak very softly,
And carry a big shtick.

*© 1982 by Patrick M. Vaughan.*



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*What they said was true. He was invisible. Inconspicuous conspicuousness. Misdirection. Or as in baseball: hit it where they ain't . . .*

# THE INVISIBLE MAN

## by GARY ALEXANDER

He runs, knees pumping high, the bank's money in his book bag. He enters the alley, which is narrow and dark, a virtual tunnel in perpetual shade from the office towers on each side.

He barely breaks stride as he tosses the wig and beard into a garbage can on the left, the Salvation Army raincoat into one to his right. Off go the pince-nez, volleyed with a skip-step into a drainage grate.

He emerges at the adjacent street, walking now, leisurely and confidently. The corner he has chosen is still free, and he has shifted the currency beneath a thick patina of evangelical tracts.

Juices flow, opening-night juices. He begins dispensing pamphlets and salvation at the top of his lungs. Scores of people pass, but nobody sees him. Who, after all, looks a deranged zealot in the eye?

Police cars are arriving, sirens howling as they force their way through the congested traffic. A beat cop trots by, walkie-talkie in hand, as he offers literature and a shouted caution against eternal damnation. The cop, obsessed with the robbery report, gives him not a glance.

What they say is true, he thinks: I *am* invisible. Inconspicuous conspicuousness. Misdirection. Or as in baseball: hit it where they ain't.

Whichever, the money is infinitely better than doing O'Neill in local theater.

After Sergeant Catlin called roll, he passed out eight-by-ten blow-ups. They were made from film in First Federal's overhead camera. "I realize it's not much. He's never looked the same twice, but it's all we've got."

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"Is he smiling again?" asked an officer.

"Can't tell through all that fur," said another.

"You're certain it's the Invisible Man?" asked a rookie.

"That's the media's label," Sergeant Catlin snapped, "not mine. Yeah, pretty sure. Twenty-one bank branches in eight weeks—all in *my* precinct. The heat's getting worse. They're making him out as Dillinger and us as the Keystone Kops. Not to mention that yo-yo running for mayor who's campaigning on waste and inefficiency of city employees."

"We respond fast," said Officer Paget, "but there are so many banks downtown and he always hits during a peak traffic period. We get there and he's gone."

Sergeant Catlin pointed a beefy finger at Paget. "The traffic affects him just like us. Don't ever say anything like that to a reporter. They'll tear us to shreds."

"Maybe he doesn't use a car."

"We've thought of that. The brass's latest brainstorm is that he hides in it, probably in an underground parking garage, until the excitement dies down. That's our latest suggestion. If he hits again, check out nearby garages, especially vans."

"Do you think he will?" asked the rookie.

Sergeant Catlin said, "Is a pig pork? Hit the bricks and bring me back a present."

Officers Paget and Bone walked to their car. They had been partners for two years. Whenever Paget drove, he always stopped at pizza parlors for lunch. Bone, a former mathematics major, enjoyed mystery fiction and empirical logic. He tended to be didactic at times. Those idiosyncrasies aside, the two men got along well.

Bone was still studying the photograph. "Rasputin," he said. "Last week he looked a little like Hitler."

"Does that mean anything to you?" Paget asked.

"Unfortunately, no. Not yet."

He dislikes motor vehicles intensely. They offend him aesthetically and he worries about the environment. He would never dream of using one as a getaway. But he does recognize their value in his profession. Today, for instance.

The teller at City Trust is so frightened she dumps greenback after greenback into his briefcase. Down an elevator into a shopping arcade he goes. Then into a men's room. Off comes the moustache, the bushy eyebrows, the shop coat emblazoned *Andy's Garage*. The

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briefcase fits nicely inside the attaché case he's hidden in a trash container.

His clunker is parked in an open lot two blocks north, one of those where you endlessly plug coins into a slot. Before leaving home, he had drained half the car's coolant; the engine and radiator remain hot and angry.

Up with the hood—and carefully, carefully—a penknife blade into a hose. He lurches back and stares with feigned exasperation at the geyser.

There he is, a businessman doubtlessly late for an appointment—shirtsleeves rolled up, tie loosened—immobile and helpless. An insurance or real-estate salesman, perhaps, so mechanically inept he can't cap a whiskey bottle without crossing the threads.

His sport coat is slung over his shoulder, his hand on his chin in puzzlement, when a black-and-white screams by. He can see the bank's sign from here, the electronic reader-board with time, temperature, and corporate logo.

He waves. "Hey! Hey!"

The police officer notices, offers a tight nod of apology, races on.

An elderly woman with a shopping bag has been observing his plight. Never can get a cop when you need one, she says.

"Isn't it the truth," he says with a sigh. "Isn't it the truth?"

"Groucho Marx, but not all that obvious," Officer Bone said, studying the latest photo at rollcall.

"Anyone ever see his gun?"

"No, but let's not encourage bank personnel to call his bluff," said Sergeant Catlin.

"What now?"

"Keep after the underground garages if he hits again," said Catlin. "It's our best bet. Any other ideas?"

"We're assuming a normal bank-robbery pattern," Officer Bone said. "Stick-up, exit, escape as quickly and far as possible from the scene."

"It's logical," said Catlin.

"He's robbed over twenty banks in a short period. I doubt if we've ever had a spree go beyond six or eight before apprehension. He's breaking the pattern, maybe. One-hundred-and-eighty degrees out of the established method."

"Here we go again," Officer Paget muttered.

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"That's very possible, Bone. All you have to do is give me some specifics and we'll run right out and pick him up."

"Sorry," said Officer Bone.

"Me too. Bye, everyone. A crew from Channel Three is waiting in the Captain's office."

He loathes pretentiousness. Thus he enjoys lunching at the Le Bordeaux. It is relatively new, yet undiscovered by the trendy set. The cookery is honest and the dining room is not a forest of ferns. His *crêpe poulet* is excellent, as is the house white wine. He must compliment Andre before leaving.

He plans retirement after one more transaction. A sizable withdrawal will stake his venture to New York or Hollywood for as long as it takes for the powers-that-be to discover and utilize his considerable talent.

But where? When?

It comes to him as he gazes out the window while smoking a cigarette, finishing his wine. Potholes! Hundreds and thousands of potholes! The winter was long and arctic, spring-warming almost instantaneous. Throughout the city, potholes have erupted with the daffodils and tulips.

He orders another glass of wine. So many to choose from, he thinks. A lead-pipe cinch.

Paget, driving today, chose a pizza joint on Jefferson Avenue. They had a special this week, he explained to the unenthusiastic Bone. If you order the fourteen-incher, you get extra cheese and a free soft drink.

They had just gotten back into the car, Paget chewing contentedly on a toothpick, Bone feeling as if he'd eaten lead, when they got the squeal: robbery in progress at the First National on Madison and Seventh.

"We're close," Paget said, standing on the accelerator. "Think it's the Invisible Man?"

"Who else?"

Lee and Blasingame in Unit Nineteen, however, beat them. Lee, at the front door, shook his head.

"Keep going," Bone said. "They can handle it."

"Where?"

"Just cruise around. We'll see what we can see."

Fifteen minutes later, Paget said, "What are we looking for?"

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"I don't know. Keep driving."

"Terrific. What'shisname running for mayor will have a field day with us for burning up municipal gas. That is, if there's anything left of us after Catlin gets done."

"Stop!"

"What?"

"Look behind you, by that mailbox."

Paget saw a man dressed in work clothes, Day-Glo vest, and hard-hat chopping furiously at a pothole with a pick.

"Let's talk to him," Bone said.

They U-turned and stopped.

"May I see some identification, sir?" asked Bone.

The man wiped perspiration from his brow and took out his wallet. "What's the deal?"

Bone did not reply. Paget called in the man's driver's-license number. Headquarters' computer showed no outstanding warrants.

"How long you gonna hassle me?" the man demanded. "I got twenty more of these things to do today or my foreman's gonna know the reason why. In case you been out of town, we got us a bumper crop."

"Where's your asphalt? You fill potholes with asphalt, don't you?" Bone asked.

"Sure, but they went and took the truck to the yard to get a load. We ran out."

"I saw your driver's license, sir. May I see your city identification card?"

The man patted his pockets. "Must be in my locker."

"Please step over to our car and extend your hands on the fender," Officer Bone asked.

Officer Paget rolled his eyes and moaned softly. A false arrest or harassment lawsuit would have them in court forever, including days off.

"What the hell is this? Where are we, Russia or someplace?"

Officer Bone did not reply. He patted the man down, starting with the vest. It did not feel fluffy; it crackled.

Bone turned to Paget. "Do you want to Mirandize him or should I?"

"It's your collar," Sergeant Catlin told Bone. "You talk to them. You ought to have the glory."

"I'll take a rain check," Bone said. "I didn't know there were that

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many cameras and microphones in the world. It looks like a presidential news conference being set up in that room."

Sergeant Catlin gave up. So had the Lieutenant, the Captain, the Deputy Chief, and the Chief of Police himself.

"Okay, but give me a once-over first."

"One-hundred-and-eighty degrees out of phase, remember. I was on the lookout for anyone who might *not* be a bank robber. If the Invisible Man had darted in front of our car with a gun and a mask, it might not have registered.

"I also guessed that the Invisible Man was still in the immediate area. If not, it would have been irrelevant and—"

"Sure. Logic."

"Right. We saw normal people doing normal things, but that was no help, so I began looking for whoever was behaving abnormally, though not criminally."

"Huh?"

"Sarge, that mayoral candidate made some good points. The public sees city employees every day not working as hard as they might. We've all noticed road crews. Four guys standing around watching the fifth lean on a shovel."

"Yeah, but it was noon. The rest could've been off for lunch."

"The Invisible Man usually picked busy times to do the banks."

"That's pretty thin," Sergeant Catlin said.

"Not really," said Officer Bone. "The suspect was sweating."

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**a *NEW* short story by**

**PENELOPE WALLACE**

**first publication in the United States**

*Can jolly laughter inspire deadly hate? . . .*

# THE TRAVELING MEDICINE CHEST

***by PENELOPE WALLACE***

Aunt Peggy was jolly. When she laughed her plump body quivered and sometimes she had to shout so that we might all hear the joke.

She laughed at the man next door who had a cleft palate and she laughed at the milkman whose wife was unfaithful—but mostly she laughed at Uncle Herbert. She laughed at his profession—he worked in a bank—and she laughed at his hobby—collecting antiques. And when he showed her the traveling medicine chest, she laughed most of all.

"And I suppose that's what you'd have used if you'd been a doctor," she yelled between gasps.

Uncle Herbert didn't answer—he never did. He just found his silver cleaning cloth and lovingly cleaned the silver caps of the bottles in the chest.

Older relatives, assuming children to be stupid and deaf, had commented in front of me and so I knew Uncle Herbert had planned to become a doctor but that Aunt Peggy had "caught him" at an early stage of his studies. I knew what was usually meant by the

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phrase, but their son—the objectionable Ronnie—had been born three years later and was, at eleven, two years younger than myself.

I was an only child and mother believed the visits to my relatives gave me an opportunity to play with my cousin and enjoy myself with "jolly" Aunt Peggy—but I stayed because I felt sorry for Uncle Herbert. I knew it pleased him to show me his "treasures" and explain their uses and origins to me. Soapstone figures from the Orient, rice-paper paintings from China, some Goss china bought many years earlier, one pot broken but carefully repaired. None had cost him much, but for him they were as precious as Inca gold.

And when Aunt Peggy condemned them as a load of rubbish, Uncle Herbert would tell her that some might become valuable.

"When you die," trilled Aunt Peggy on a burst of laughter, "they won't fetch a penny—they're for the dustbin."

"They're for Ronnie, Peggy. Look after them for Ronnie. Especially the medicine chest. If Ronnie becomes a doctor—"

Her laughter was joined by Ronnie's.

"I don't want to be a doctor. Or a moldy bank clerk. I'm going to join the Air Force and be a pilot."

I could cheerfully have slapped the boy, but Aunt Peggy felt no such desire. "He's a chip off the old block," she said. "Just like his mother." And they laughed together.

"Of course if any of the things *were* worth anything," she added, "I'd sell them like a shot and buy Ron one of those kits he's got his eye on."

"You wouldn't need to," said Uncle Herbert patiently. "I carry heavy insurance. If anything happened to me, if I had another coronary, you wouldn't have to worry. And you could look after my things—the silver-topped bottles in the medicine chest—"

But Aunt Peggy was laughing again.

It's strange how vividly I remembered that conversation, although maybe not so strange in view of what happened.

One day when I returned from school, my mother called me into the living room and closed the door.

"I've some very sad news," she told me. "Your Uncle Herbert has died. It seems he had another heart attack—anyway, he died this afternoon and I think it would be nice if you went round to see if you can help Aunty Peggy and Ronnie."

I went round, but there was nothing I could do. I don't think either of them missed Uncle Herbert as much as I did and when I went

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into his den and saw his soapstone figures and his beloved medicine chest, I started to cry.

It was three weeks later that the rumors started and the police called on Aunt Peggy.

It appeared that Uncle Herbert's "coronary" was in effect a massive dose of cyanide. There were neighbors—including the man with the cleft palate—to say that Aunt Peggy had despised her husband and that she had benefited from a large insurance policy when he died. And, one way and another, no one except Ronnie was either surprised or unhappy when Aunt Peggy was arrested for the wilful murder of Uncle Herbert. Arrested, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Ronnie came to live with us. Mother packed up Aunt Peggy's belongings for her eventual release, and the house and furniture were sold. "Uncle Herbert wanted Ronnie to have his antiques," I told my father, and they were packed carefully in a chest and put in Ronnie's room. And there they stayed, serving as a table for Ronnie's latest Airfix model.

Two years passed, and it was decided that Ronnie should go to boarding school. The first time he was away, I crept into his room, carefully moved the model plane, and started to unpack the chest. Surely if Ronnie saw those beautiful carvings on his mantelpiece, the lovely medicine chest, he'd grow to love them as his father had.

I unpacked the chest and before I opened it I fetched the silver polish and an old duster. Uncle Herbert would never approve of tarnished bottles.

I lifted the lid, and there, folded neatly in the box, was a letter. I opened it and read it.

> To whom it may concern:
>
> I, Herbert Smith, being of sound mind, have decided to end my life. I have purchased 2 grams of cyanide from South & Tuckett and signed my name in the poison book as John Frame. My wife knows nothing about my intention.
>
> (signed) Herbert Smith

It was dated the morning he died.

So Aunt Peggy was not a murderer and should not be in prison.

But she had destroyed Uncle Herbert's soul with her cruel laughter as surely as Uncle Herbert had been driven to destroy his body.

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I refolded the paper and put it back in the medicine chest, then I wrapped and repacked the other antiques and put the Airfix model on top of the box.

Maybe Ronnie would one day unpack the box, open the medicine chest, and read the note.

Sadly I picked up the silver cleaner. I would like to have made the bottle tops shine as Uncle Herbert had done.

Looking back on that night, I realize that perhaps my motives were not as pure as I had thought. You see, Aunt Peggy had always laughed at me too.

For what is so hilarious as a young girl with a club foot?

"Q"

## DETECTIVERSE

*"IN" SPECTER*

by BETTY L. HERRING

There once was a ghost named Herr Cule
Who delighted in "playing it ghoul"
Till he frightened a victim
So badly he kicked him,
Now the haunted can taunt: "Rid o' Cule!"

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**a NEW Henry Turnbuckle story by**

**JACK RITCHIE**

*"Well, congratulations, Henry," Ralph said, rubbing his hands. "You've done it again. . ."*

*And congratulations to Henry's creator, Jack Ritchie, who this year won an Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America for writing the best mystery short story of 1981, "The Absence of Emily," which appeared in the January 28, 1981 issue of EQMM. Take a bow, Mr. Ritchie. Take a bow, Henry. We're proud of you. . .*

# THE FIFTH GRAVE

***by JACK RITCHIE***

When Ralph celebrated his twentieth wedding anniversary he invited me to the party and there I met his brother-in-law, Julius, a civil engineer.

"Well, well," Julius said, "Ralph's been telling me a lot about you, Henry. When you start deducting, the fur flies and nothing is sacred."

I smiled modestly. "I *do* try my best."

Ralph, Julius, and I were in the kitchen, where Ralph was making drinks for the crowd.

"I think I've got a problem for you to work on, Henry," Julius said. "It's about a missing body."

Naturally I became attentive.

Julius began. "Four years ago I was on a job up in Sheboygan County. We were rebuilding a country road—widening it and putting on a new topping. It was one of those roads that meanders all over the place, so while we were at it we decided to straighten it out as much as we could."

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I nodded understandingly. If there is anything a civil engineer cannot endure it is a meandering road.

"Well, there was the country cemetery—just a little bit of a thing, maybe an acre or less. No buildings. And we needed a chunk off one end of the property for our road. That meant we had to move six graves.

"Getting permission to move graves is a delicate thing and you want to do it as quietly as you can. The last thing you want is a lot of publicity. So our firm's lawyers moved on tiptoe, so to speak, and we got the authorization.

"We moved six graves. But there were only *five* bodies. I mean there wasn't anything at all in the fifth grave—just the tombstone on top. I still remember the name. Lucas Martin. But no coffin, no body, no bones. You could see the spot hadn't even been dug up before."

"Hmm," I said wisely. "Did you note the date of death on the tombstone?"

"November 8, 1913."

November 8, 1913? Somehow that rang a bell in my memory. Where had I heard or seen that date before? "Did you call this matter of the missing body to the attention of the local authorities?"

"Hell, no. We were on a schedule. There's no telling how much time we'd have lost if we had to wait for some kind of an investigation. No, we just kept everything to ourselves and moved the five bodies and six tombstones to another part of the cemetery.

"And there were a couple of strange things about the sixth grave too. For one, the date of death was exactly the same as on the fifth tombstone—November 8, 1913. And for another, we found a body all right—a skeleton actually—but no coffin.

"I mean, after all those years you'd still expect to find enough scraps to show there had been one. But there was nothing. Just the skeleton. And Leslie Randolph—that was the name on the tombstone—must have been a woman, because there was enough left of the shoes she was buried in to tell us they were the high-button kind women wore in those days."

Julius and Ralph now regarded me expectantly.

"Well," I said, "First of all, since these two people evidently died on the same day I deduce that it might have been as a result of some kind of an epidemic. Typhus, perhaps, or diphtheria, both of which were rampant in those days. How old were they when they died?"

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Julius thought a moment. "As I remember, both were about twenty-one or twenty-two."

I mulled the problem over for ten or fifteen seconds. "Or possibly they died in an automobile accident, with both of them in the same or conflicting vehicles. There were auto accidents, you know, even in 1913."

Ralph asked the pertinent question. "But why weren't both of them buried? Why just one?"

"I don't know yet, Ralph," I admitted. "However, I will give the matter thought. There is nothing that the deductive brain cannot unravel provided it is given all the facts. Have you forgotten anything, Julius?"

"No. That's it. The whole ball of wax."

What did I have to work with? Obviously, my starting point must be that date, November 8, 1913, but that would have to wait until tomorrow. I helped Ralph and Julius carry the trays of drinks into the living room.

The next day, after Ralph and I finished our shifts and signed out at headquarters, I went directly to the Journal Building where I got permission to consult the newspaper's back files.

The moment I saw the headlines for November 8, 1913, I had the solution for the entire conundrum. How simple it all was once you knew the facts.

I was so enthused I drove right over to Ralph's house where he was preparing to mow the lawn before supper.

"Ralph," I announced, "I have the solution to the problem of the unoccupied grave. The key to the entire matter is the date—November 8, 1913."

"What about November 8, 1913?"

"Between November seventh and the twelfth, in 1913, the Great Lakes experienced one of the worst storms in their history. Millions of dollars of damage was done and eight lake boats went down with all hands."

Ralph, who was born far inland, attempted to correct me. "Lake *ships*."

"No, Ralph. Lake *boats*. No matter what the size of a lake vessel, lake sailors traditionally refer to it as a boat." I returned to the main point. "Anyway, among the hundreds of lives lost were those of Leslie Randolph and Lucas Martin. They were either passengers, or possibly crewpersons, aboard one of those ill-fated lake boats."

"Crewperson? Leslie Randolph? In 1913?"

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I was bulging with information. "Ralph, in those days the cooks on the lake boats were often women. As a matter of fact, on some of the boats they were husband-and-wife teams. Though not, evidently, in this case."

"What has all this got to do with the empty grave?"

"Ralph, when people are lost at sea—or in this case at lake—and their bodies are never recovered, it is often the custom to erect a tombstone over a blank plot in a cemetery to commemorate the event. And *that* is why there was no body beneath the tombstone of Lucas Martin. His body was never recovered. On the other hand, the body of Leslie Randolph *was* recovered—probably washed ashore—and it was buried under the sixth tombstone."

Ralph nodded to indicate that, so far, he went along with me. "But that still leaves something to explain, Henry. Why wasn't Leslie Randolph buried in a coffin?"

"I can only guess, Ralph. Perhaps Leslie Randolph's relatives decided to scrimp on funeral expenses. Or possibly she belonged to some stark religous sect that eschewed coffins."

But frankly I was not at all statisfied with either of those answers. The question remained, why *had* Leslie Randolph been buried without a coffin?

The subject continued to nag at the back of my mind, and so, three weeks later, when Captain Johnson sent Ralph and me up to Sturgeon Bay to pick up a fugitive I took the opportunity to detour, traveling through quite pleasant farm country liberally sprinkled with dairy herds. We arrived at the cemetery a little after eleven in the morning and parked at the side of the road.

The sun-dappled acre was surrounded on three sides by tall old trees, with the open side abutting the road. Across that road, perhaps a hundred yards back, stood a neat farm with its enclave of barn, silos, and outbuildings.

A large farm hound began barking and loping in our direction. I hesitated about getting out of the car until I saw him come to a halt, ready to defend his property but choosing not to venture across the road.

Ralph and I, with one eye on the hound, left the car and proceeded to stroll through the cemetery, reading tombstones, some of which dated back to the 1830s. Certain family names seemed to predominate—Randolph, Martin, Riley and Armstrong.

I found the transplanted graves of Leslie Randolph and Lucas

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Martin and verified the dates. Yes, November 8, 1913, and both of them had been twenty-two when they died.

I heard the slam of a screen door in the distance and turned to see a woman walking in our direction carrying a shotgun.

She closed the distance between us and I saw that she was perhaps in her middle twenties, with dark hair and violet eyes. She gave the hound the order to stop barking and then both of them crossed the road. At our car, she paused momentarily to stare at the license plate and then halted some fifteen feet from Ralph and me.

I smiled fully. "Do you always greet visitors to this cemetery with a double-barreled shotgun?"

She remained cautious. "That depends. If I don't recognize the car or the people I like to find out what's going on."

"Madam," I said joshingly, "we do not have the slightest intention of stealing bodies or tombstones."

"How about trees?" she asked, keeping the shotgun steady and aimed.

I thought the proper time had come for me to introduce myself. "My name is Detective-Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle," I said impressively. "Of the Milwaukee Police Department." I produced my wallet for identification purposes and held it at arm's length.

She came close enough to study my badge, my picture, and my face. She did the same for Ralph and then relaxed somewhat and the dog totally, his tail thumping.

"What in the world are two Milwaukee detectives doing in this part of the country?"

"Just passing through on our way up north on official business," I said. "And at the same time trying to solve a little mystery." I pointed to the headstones of Leslie Randolph and Lucas Martin. "I notice that both of these people seem to have died on the same day."

She looked at the stones. "Oh, yes. They died in the Great Lake Storm of 1913. Both of them were crewmen on one of the lake boats and it went down with all hands."

Ralph gazed at me with what I interpreted as great admiration for my deductive powers.

I chuckled. "And Leslie Randolph was undoubtedly a cook on the vessel?"

She shrugged. "I wouldn't know. He could have been a deck hand."

I blinked. He? "Leslie Randolph was a man?"

"But of course. As a matter of fact, both of them were my great-grandfather's best friends. The three of them had planned on work-

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ing on the lake boats together, but then Great-grandfather's father died, so he decided to get married instead and take over the farm. Neither one of their bodies was ever recovered." She introduced herself. "Louise Armstrong. I'm baby-sitting the farm today. Everybody else is at the fair."

I rubbed my chin. Neither body was recovered? Then whose body was under Leslie Randolph's memorial stone? And, more important, why?

But then I had it. "Miss Armstrong," I said, pointing at Randolph's headstone, "would it surprise you to learn that there is a woman's skeleton under that tombstone and that she was the victim of a murder that occured nearly seventy years ago?"

She studied me doubtfully.

I turned to Ralph. "Where does one hide a tree? In a forest, of course. And where does one hide a body? In a cemetery." I frowned darkly.

"Ralph, I could have deduced all of this in Milwaukee had Julius but given me all the facts."

"What facts didn't he give you?"

"Ralph, if you are surreptitiously burying a body, especially in a semi-public place, you do not dig down the traditional six feet. You are anxious to get the matter over with as quickly as possible and leave the premises. Therefore you dig only as deep as you have to, which is perhaps three or four feet. And Julius failed to mention, or observe, that the grave must have been shallow."

Then I smiled confidently. "The individual who committed the murder *knew* that those tombstones were over empty plots. Now only two things remain to be ferreted out. Who was the victim and who was the murderer?"

I proceeded to think while they watched me respectfully and naturally I arrived at part of the solution in short order.

"Ralph," I said, "if you were going to bury a body in this cemetery and did not want to be observed while in the process, how would you go about it?"

"I'd wait until it got dark."

"But how could you see well enough to dig the grave? Would you bring a lantern? No, the light would gleam in the night like a terrestrial star and draw the curiosity of anyone who glimpsed it."

"All right, so I'd wait until there was moonlight."

"Ralph, I doubt that even moonlight would provide sufficient light for what you had to do."

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"Why not?"

"Because you would want to *very* carefully conceal what you had done. After all, this is a functioning cemetery. People are bound to come here occasionally to pay their respects or to bury others. If the burying was done clumsily and there was evidence of digging it would draw immediate suspicion, especially from those who knew there was supposed to be no body under the tombstone.

"No, Ralph, in order to conceal the fact that one has buried a body one must go to a bit of trouble. First, one must carefully remove the sod and set it aside. Then one must spread out a tarpaulin upon which to deposit the raw earth one excavates. Then when the hole is dug and the body deposited one returns as much of the earth to the grave as one can and replaces the sod. Then one gathers up the soil displaced by the body and decompactation and carries it somewhere else for dispersal. And in order to be this painstaking I would venture to say that only daylight is suitable."

Ralph looked at the road. "Wouldn't that be taking pretty much of a chance, to dig by daylight? People would be bound to drive by and see what you were doing and wonder why. And what about the farm across the road? Anybody living there would certainly notice you."

"True, Ralph. Therefore I deduce that the body was buried early in the morning. *Very* early in the morning. This is dairy-farming country, Ralph, and farmers must remain home mornings to do the milking and adjacent chores before they can think of traveling anywhere. Therefore, our digger could count on the roads being deserted until at least mid-morning. And as for the farm across the road, while farmers rise early for milking—in the height of the summer when the sun rises at nearly four A.M.—they do not rise *that* early. They remain abed until their regular milking time, which is usually around six o'clock, summer, winter, spring, and fall.

"Hence, in that interval of daylight, say between four and six A.M. on a summer's day, when the occupants of the farm across the road were still asleep in their beds, the murderer came here with his body and buried it."

I did not exactly expect applause but a little appreciation would have been appropriate.

"What about the dogs?" Louise asked.

"What dogs?"

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"Just about every farmer has a dog or two. And they bark. So even if this burying was done between four and six A.M., the dogs across the road would have barked their fool heads off until—" She stopped and became deeply thoughtful.

I attacked the problem of the dogs. "Ah ha," I said. "I have it. The *only* person who could have buried the body without having the dogs go crazy was actually—" I stopped and cleared my throat. "How long have Armstrongs lived on the farm across the road?"

"We are a Century Farm. Ever since 1842."

I thought about that some more and sighed. "Well, as long as I have gone this far I might as well finish it. As I deduce it, the only person who could have conducted the digging without raising a commotion would have had to be the *owner* of those dogs. And that, I am afraid to say, must have been one of your ancestors. Say your great-grandfather, perhaps?"

Louise said nothing.

I smiled magnanimously. "You may trust me to remain silent on this matter. I was merely indulging in the mental exercise presented by the problem, a veritable cerebral etude." I chuckled good-naturedly. "After all, the murder is nearly seventy years old. History. So let sleeping murderers lie. The victim is dead, and, by now, so is the murderer."

Again Louise said absolutely nothing.

I frowned and then did some quick arithmetic. I was rather astounded. "Do you mean to say that your great-grandfather is still *alive*?"

She nodded reluctantly. "He's ninety-one. And great-grandmother is ninety. They've been married sixty-seven years and they've retired to Florida."

Sixty-seven years? I did some more mental arithmetic and was again astounded. "That would mean he married her in about 1915. However—in the matter of Martin Lucas and Leslie Randolph—you distinctly said that your great-grandfather had planned to go with them on the lake boats, but he got married 'instead' and took over the farm. That would mean he married in 1913 or prior to that. In other words, he was married at least twice. What happened to his first wife?"

"She ran away with a traveling salesman," Louise said firmly.

"Ah ha," I said, wrapping it up, "so your great-grandfather told anyone who inquired. But did anyone ever see or hear from her again? Or from the mythical traveling salesman, for that matter?"

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Louise had a remarkable way with silence.

Ralph rubbed his hands. "Well, congratulations, Henry. You've done it again. You've got your murderer and he's alive."

"Now Ralph, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since—"

"It's your sworn duty to uphold the law," Ralph said solemnly. You've got to go down there with extradition papers and drag that old man from the side of his wife and bring him back here for justice."

"Ralph, we've got to take into consideration the ages of both—"

"I can see the headlines now, Henry. *Detective Solves Seventy-year-old Murder. Collars Ninety-one-year-old Suspect.* Your picture will be in every newspaper and your name on everyone's lips. You might even get into the *Guinness Book of Records* for arresting the oldest murder suspect in the United States. Maybe the world."

"Ralph," I said, feeling a bit warm, "you don't seem to understand that my deductions, though undoubtedly correct, are all theoretical. In the world of practicality, we could meet with all kinds of stumbling blocks."

"What stumbling blocks, Henry?"

"Well, he might fight extradition, for instance. And then there's the body. Could we *positively* identify it as that of his first wife?"

"Science is marvelous, Henry. Face it, you've got him nailed."

My voice seemed a little higher than usual. "I do *not* have him nailed, Ralph. It is entirely possible that I may be wrong."

Strangely, Ralph seemed to be enjoying the situation. "But, Henry, your deduction about the dog was absolutely brilliant. It proves that Great-grandfather Armstrong was the only man who could have done the burying."

"About that dog," I said a trifle desperately, "we are *assuming* there was a dog. But Armstrong could have been an exception to the rule of dogs and farmsteads. Or, if he had a dog, this dog could have recently died and the burying of the unidentified body could have taken place between the time of the dog's death and the time the newly acquired puppy had learned how to bark. Great-grandfather Armstrong could have slept through the whole thing and any stranger with a body could have sneaked into the cemetery and buried her. Whoever she was."

Ralph was silent for a few moments and then he sighed dramatically. "Well, Henry, do you really and truly think we should forget about the whole thing?"

"I do, I do." I stared into the far distance. "Ralph, there are times

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when I think this entire universe is a put-on and I'm the only one who hasn't been told."

Louise's smile had been growing. "Would you like to come up to the house and have a cup of coffee or something?"

"Do you have any sherry?" Ralph asked. "At a time like this, Henry finds that nothing bucks him up like a glass of sherry."

We walked toward the house.

"Trees?" I said.

Louise nodded. "I thought you two might be timber cruisers. They ride about the countryside looking for valuable trees, mainly black walnut. There are about a half dozen in that grove around the cemetery and they're worth more than a thousand dollars each. Sometimes the cruisers make the farmer an offer, but other times they just make a note of the place and sneak back at night or when the farmer isn't home. Sam Riley down the road had two of his black walnuts cut down just a few weeks ago. They were at the other end of his pasture and he didn't hear or see a thing."

Inside the house, Louise found a half empty bottle of sherry and dusted it off with a kitchen towel. She poured me a glass. "Why don't you come back sometime soon and solve the Mystery of the Purloined Black Walnut Trees?"

"I may," I said. I held my glass to the light. The *Guinness Book of Records?* I shook away the temptation and drank my sherry.

## DETECTIVERSE

### *WANDERING MINSTREL*

*by JOHN M. HEBERT*

There was a musician named Smoot,
A thievin', dishonest galoot.
He walked into a store
With a weapon, large bore,
And said, "Okay, gimme the lute!"

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a *NEW* short story by

**WILLIAM BANKIER**

*Stone was in prison for damaging a door handle. Conroy and Hutchison were trained guards—they could cope up to a point. But this man was something else . . .*

# DOORS

## *by WILLIAM BANKIER*

Joe Conroy stood at the foot of the stairway and called up into the darkness. "Aren't you coming down for coffee?"

"I'm not going with you this morning." His wife's voice was muffled behind the bedroom door. "I can't go back there."

"The magistrate brings in his decision today. It won't look good if you aren't there."

"Then it won't look good."

Conroy stared at a threadbare patch in the carpet. The quotation for having new broadloom installed was among the sheaf of bills stacked beside the breadbox. The estimate was three times what he could afford. With inflation, it would be fifteen percent higher next year. These were the good times.

He walked upstairs, went to the door of his wife's bedroom, and put his lips close to the panel. "Clara, don't leave me to do this alone."

"I want to sleep. Then I have to go and get the kids, Rebecca can't keep them any longer."

"Are you bringing them home?"

"I'll have to take taxis. I'll need money. Leave the checkbook on the kitchen table."

"Clara, are you bringing Lenny and Mark *home?*"

The telephone rang. Conroy listened to his wife answering on the

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extension. It sounded as if Chuck Hutchison was coming around to pick him up in the car. Clara confirmed this when she hung up. "He's on his way."

The closed door confronting Conroy seemed to extend to infinity in every direction. It had a personality; the door was smug, and without sympathy. Sleeping in separate rooms was a bad thing. He had never enjoyed being down the hall in the small back room. But Clara slept so lightly, and a few years ago he had begun tossing and turning—or so she said. All he had was her word for it, but why else would she punch him awake in the middle of the night, bringing him out of what he thought was deep sleep? The drawn face, hollow eyes glaring at him, half lit by the bedside lamp. "Can't you lie still?" she had hissed at him, keeping her voice down, reminding him of the two young boys in the next room.

He lay back, heart pounding, furious, yet sorry for her at the same time. She was not happy. And to Conroy's way of thinking, that was Conroy's fault.

He gave up on achieving his wife's companionship for this final day in court and went downstairs to wait for Hutchison. He put on his boots, then his raincoat, buttoned it in front of the long oak mirror in the living room, turning his head to inspect his haircut. He had dead hair. The short grey strands refused to comb flat as they had done in the past. Following a football game, he used to shower and comb it wet to emerge from the dressing room bruised and clean and gleaming.

The girls would be there, the guys would gather them up. Then came drinking and dancing and singing and once in a while a glorious punchup in the parking lot. "If you can't win the game, win the fight." Who had given Conroy that piece of advice? He remembered who it was. His father, bent over a table covered with papers, eyes focusing with difficulty through thick glasses on young Joe poised to say goodbye with his school books under one arm and his football helmet crooked in the other.

"Can you come to the game, Dad?"

"No time for games, son. An accountant's work is never done. My clients are a bunch of crooks. If I don't hide their swindles, we'll all go to jail."

A car pulled up outside the house. Conroy went to the window and recognized Chuck Hutchison's ancient sedan. With its pattern of patches where he had hammered out dents and applied undercoat,

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the vehicle looked camouflaged like a World War II staff car. Conroy went to the foot of the stairs.

"I'm off, Clara!"

Silence.

Clara Conroy listened to her husband's movements downstairs terminated by the slam of the front door. She sat up, punching two pillows into a support for her head and shoulders, then switched on the bedside lamp so she could see to dial the telephone.

"Rebecca, it's me. He's just left."

Rebecca's voice was half obscured by the shrill clamor of children taking each other on. "Are you packed?"

"Mostly. I should be there by noon."

"Soup and a sandwich. You have been warned."

"Can we get away as soon as we've eaten? I want to be gone before Joe gets home."

"I'm with you. It's the car, though. The muffler people promised me for two o'clock but I'll believe that when it happens."

"I'm nervous about what Joe may do."

"Don't worry. By the time he finds out you're gone, we'll be a long way down the road."

Clara put down the telephone. She looked at the mosaic of snapshots in small individual frames on the wall beside the bed. Joe in skates on the rink he had built in the back yard. Lenny in his sea-cadet uniform. Mark in the mortarboard the nursery school put on him when he graduated. Herself crouching on the front steps with the boys on either side, possessive arms drawing them close.

The answer would have been for her never to have married Joe in the first place. She liked older men and had pursued this one with her customary tenacity. Then almost from day one of the marriage, she had sensed her mistake. He was an authoritarian who disapproved of most of the activities that gave her pleasure. It was like having a second father.

Clara sat up, put her feet on the floor, saw herself in the vanity mirror. The hollow eyes, the frown lines, hardened her resolve. She was getting out, today. To criticize her for escaping would be like expecting a person to sit tight in a burning building.

On the way downtown to the Court House, Joe asked Chuck how he thought the verdict was going to go. Chuck seemed to chew the question along with his quid of gum. His hatbrim almost covered

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his eyes, which meant he had to hold his chin up at an aggressive angle. "The magistrate will let us off," he said. "What else can he do?"

"He can put us in jail."

"You're kidding. With jails crowded the way they are and the media full of campaigns to reduce the prison population? He won't even suspend us."

"You think not?"

"They haven't got enough guards as it is. They can't recruit decent candidates to train for the prison service. Not with the conditions we have to work under, and the lousy pay. So he's going to suspend two experienced guards? Never."

"I wish I had your confidence."

The car stopped at a traffic light. Hutchison took the gum from his mouth. "You can have it," he said, pressing the gum onto Conroy's forehead.

It was a typically outrageous, disgusting, hilarious Hutchison act. Conroy could laugh or be sick or bring his elbow sharply against the side of his companion's head, stunning him, perhaps killing him. He experienced all these inclinations. In the end, as the car pulled away, he did nothing but sat there, solemn and silent, being driven to court by his fellow-accused in a rattletrap tumbril of a car with a gob of wet chewing-gum stuck to his forehead.

The magistrate had what seemed to be a bottomless stack of papers to turn over. He wore thick glasses and from time to time he glanced up and frowned. He was an elderly man and seemed to be, in Conroy's opinion, the embodiment of disapproval. After a few false starts, including a critical comment to the reporters on the press bench and a request for fresh water in his carafe, the jurist began his summing up.

"We have been collecting testimony this week," he began, "to discover if there is sufficient evidence in the case of Denzil Stone to justify binding over the two accused for trial by jury." The magistrate turned a page and cleared his throat. "Denzil Stone died in his prison cell sometime between the hours of eight P.M. and four A.M. on the night of March fifteenth, last. The medical examiner has testified that he died as a result of internal injuries brought about by—"

Conroy remembered well the night of March fifteenth. He was on duty in E wing. Stone had been causing trouble all day. His behavior was so extreme, Conroy could only believe the man was deliberately

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trying to be provocative. All right, maybe he was a mental case. But crazy people, too, in Conroy's opinion, had their reasons for doing what they did. And sometimes the reason was evil.

"I'm going to look in on Number Eleven," he had said, listening to the noise from the far end of the corridor.

"I'll come with you." Hutchison finished his coffee and placed the empty mug on the window ledge.

"He really gets on my nerves."

"That's his game. And he's good at it."

Conroy unlocked a steel door and the two guards passed through into a corridor and walked quickly past a single row of cells to the room where Denzil Stone was isolated. Again a key, the turning lock, the swinging heavy door, and there was Stone, naked to the waist, sweating, his face flushed. The wreckage of his bed littered the floor of the cell.

"Now you've got noplace to sleep, dummy," Hutchison said, aiming a kick at the shredded mattress.

Conroy closed the door behind him and confronted the prisoner. Stone was far from the first manic case they had been put in charge of. He and Chuck were trained guards—they could cope up to a point. After that, there were doctors, restraints, sedatives. But this man was something else.

He was triumphant, that was it. He believed he couldn't lose. He was an inflated, spoiled baby. The prematurely bald head, the pursed wet lips, the glazed eyes—and tonight, the almost naked body—persuaded Conroy that here was infantile unreason. But it went beyond that. Stone was intelligent, articulate—he was goading Conroy for some reason, enjoying needling him.

"You stink, man. Look at your shirt. Why don't you use a deodorant, pig?"

Hutchison said, "Do we call in the medical officer?"

"I don't think he's crazy," Conroy said.

"I don't think he is either. Last time the doc didn't like being called down here for nothing."

"Clear this up," Conroy said to the prisoner. "Get it together so you can sleep on it."

"Can't I sleep with you?" Stone asked in a sing-song voice. "You're so big and strong, and I'm so afraid."

Conroy looked at Hutchison, who absorbed whatever he saw in Conroy's face and then glanced away. Conroy stumbled over the

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broken frame of the bed and had to catch himself against the painted brickwork.

"How many drinks have you had?" Stone crowed. "Is it true you're a lush?" The prisoner laughed. He blew his nose on his fingers and snapped them in Conroy's direction.

Conroy grabbed Stone by the wrist and used the prisoner's arm to wipe the stuff from his tunic. Stone put his other arm around Conroy's neck. "Kiss, kiss," he said.

Conroy hit Stone in the stomach, driving him against the wall. The head went down, then came back up, grinning at him, encouraging him to go on. Conroy moved closer and punched again. Stone's bloodied face beamed in ecstasy.

The magistrate was still recapitulating the case. "Mr. Stone was in prison for damaging a door handle. His wife had gone to stay with her parents that night because the deceased was in a state of high excitement. During the late evening, Mr. Stone went to the house of his in-laws and tried to gain entry. They had locked the doors and, probably wisely, refused to open up. In his efforts to gain entry, Mr. Stone broke the handle from the front door and caused further damage by kicking against the panel. Shortly thereafter, the police arrived and he was taken into custody."

Conroy looked across the room at Stone's widow, who was seated beside her mother. The women could have been sisters. Both were youthful, long hair professionally styled, confident faces, demanding mouths. He had never seen Stone's wife until this week but Conroy felt he had always known her.

The magistrate was concluding: "I do not find, therefore, that there is sufficient evidence to warrant a jury trial in this case." The reaction around the courtroom included chatter from the press bench and a cry of disappointment from Stone's family. "However, I think it would be unsuitable for the two officers involved to resume their duties at this time. I recommend that they be suspended until further notice. This hearing is closed."

Conroy leaned close to Hutchison. "You know what that means."

"Yeah. We have to start looking for a job outside the prison service. Some hope."

"I'm sorry, Chuck."

"You did what you had to do." Stone's widow was resisting the efforts of friends to lead her from the courtroom. Her eyes told the

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guards that if she had a sharp knife and they were alone she would carve them into small pieces.

"Only somebody who's worked in a prison," Hutchison concluded, "would understand."

Conroy arrived home at three in the afternoon, having stopped off with Hutchison for a couple of drinks. It took him a few minutes to absorb the implications of the empty rooms, the missing clothes. When he understood, he left the house and headed for Rebecca's place two blocks away, alternating between a fast walk and a trot.

Rebecca's car was in the driveway, the trunk open, baggage inside. The front door of the house stood open. As he came up the walk, somebody slammed the door and he heard the bolt slide home.

Conroy moved onto the lawn where he could see in through the front window. The boys were there looking out at him, Mark's expression one of sly embarrassment; Lenny frowning, tight-lipped, dominated by an obsession, which he might never understand, to see things done correctly.

Clara appeared suddenly between the boys, bending to them, seizing a son in either arm and drawing them to her. He could read her lips: "Go away!" Then she felt she had to turn to the boys and smile reassuringly, and when she looked back through the window a trace of the smile remained.

Conroy saw his family behind the glass as nothing real—as a snapshot in a frame. He strode back to the door and grasped the brass handle. He shook it but nothing moved. The door was ignoring him as if he did not exist. His urge to penetrate it was overwhelming.

Conroy twisted the handle. It snapped, came away in his fist, and he flung it onto the lawn. As he began putting his boot to the panel, seeing it splinter, hearing the screams inside, he knew Clara would be on the telephone to the police, but there was nothing he could do about it now.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Uncle George Crowder story by

**HUGH PENTECOST**

*Thomas Gorman, son-in-law of the powerful Willard Sayles, president of the giant Sayles Corporation, had been horribly burned while helping fellow passengers escape from the flaming wreckage of a jet airliner that crash-landed just outside Washington, D.C. A terrible circumstance which brought him to the village of Lakeview, where he drew the sympathetic attention of the local residents, including our old friend, Uncle George Crowder . . .*

# BITTER SECRET

***by HUGH PENTECOST***

It isn't surprising that an adult male walking around the shopping center of a small New England village on a hot July day wearing a woolen ski mask over his head should attract attention. But the fact was that the people of Lakeview knew who the man was, why he was wearing the hood, and that he was a kind of national hero who had been seen on their television screens on several occasions in the last few months.

Thomas Gorman was an electronics engineer employed by the giant Sayles Corporation, manufacturers of business machines, computers, and communications systems; in control of airlines, hotels, and oil and steel interests all over the world. Willard Sayles, president of the corporation, was not a stranger in Lakeview. He had a mansion out by the lake and an elaborate hunting lodge up on Lakeview Mountain. Gorman, married to Sayles' daughter Dorothy and father of his two grandchildren, had come to stay in the hunting lodge after that terrible day on which he'd become a public figure.

A jet airliner returning from the Middle East to the United States

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had crashed on landing just outside Washington, D.C. The pilot had misjudged his approach to the runway, smashed into a hangar building, and skidded into the marshland three hundred yards past its scheduled landing spot. It had burst into flames and was almost instantly a furnace of death.

Thomas Gorman, first of over a hundred passengers and crew to reach the safety of a crumpled wing, had not run away and saved his own hide. He had stayed on the flaming plane to help other passengers out. Eleven people owed their lives to him. They, and Gorman himself, were the only survivors.

But Gorman, after helping the eleven to safety, had staggered away from the wreck, his clothes on fire, a living torch. In the burn-unit of a nearby hospital his condition was called critical and it was reported that his face had been terribly burned. The President of the United States made a personal phone call to the burned man to commend him for his heroic efforts. The media spread the story from coast to coast.

A couple of months passed and it was reported that Tom Gorman would recover. He could, by way of his father-in-law, Willard Sayles, have the very best care available, the best plastic surgeons to restore the inhuman-looking remnants of his face.

It was after the preliminary efforts of these surgeons that Tom Gorman came to stay at his father-in-law's hunting lodge in Lakeview, his face covered when he appeared in public. There would have to be further operations. Gorman issued a statement to the press. He didn't want even his wife and children to see the terrible results of the fire. Until the surgeons had provided him with something human he would not appear in public—or in private, for that matter—without his face covered.

And so he came to Lakeview, driving into town from the lodge about once a week for supplies. It was rumored that he drove into New York City one day a week so that his doctors could see how he was progressing. The Ladies Auxiliary baked desserts and sent them to the lodge. The local clergy prayed for him in church. And a friendly people waited for some indication that Gorman would welcome company, his face covered or not. The signal did not come.

Twenty years ago Lucille Barrington was a legal secretary to George Crowder, practicing lawyer in Lakeview. Crowder, a brilliant attorney, said to have a political future that would almost certainly take him to the Governor's mansion—and who knows how

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far beyond that in later years?—had abandoned that career as a result of a tragic miscarriage of justice. George Crowder, then State's Attorney, had convicted a man of murder and heard the death sentence handed down by the judge. After the man had died for his crime it was revealed that he had been, beyond any doubt, completely innocent. Crowder abandoned his legal career, unpersuaded that he was not at fault, that he had prosecuted on the basis of evidence supplied by the State Police and local authorities. He disappeared from his home town of Lakeview for a number of years, and it was rumored that he was drinking himself to death somewhere.

Ten years later George Crowder came back to Lakeview, built himself a log cabin on Lakeview Mountain, and lived there alone with his setter, Timmy. His most ardent admirer was his nephew, twelve-year-old Joey Trimble, son of his sister Esther and Hector Trimble, the local druggist. Joey talked so much about his Uncle George that the whole town began to call Crowder Uncle George. He was the best man in town with a dog and a gun in the woods—"maybe in the whole state, maybe in the whole country, maybe in the whole world," according to Joey.

"It's wonderful to see you again, Lucille," Uncle George told his former secretary, "but I don't practice law any more, you know."

"My friend doesn't need a lawyer," Lucille Barrington said. "She needs a wise man."

"Because I turned out not to be a wise man is why I'm no longer a lawyer," Uncle George said.

"You can refuse to let Laurie Williams tell you her story," Lucille said. "But I ask it of you."

"Without telling me what it's all about?"

"I can only tell you that it has to do with a man who has recently become your neighbor—Thomas Gorman."

The lines of compassion at the corners of Uncle George's eyes deepened. "Poor devil. I see him wandering around, his face covered by a hood. He must have been horribly mutilated. He obviously wants privacy, so I've not intruded on him."

"Please talk to Laurie," Lucille said. "She won't come to Lakeview, but she'll meet you anywhere else you choose. I ask it for her, but I also ask it for me. You can always say no to her when you've listened."

And so it was that two days later Uncle George found himself having lunch with Laurie Williams in a cozy little restaurant some

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twenty miles from Lakeview. Mrs. Williams was, Uncle George guessed, a woman in her mid-forties, still extraordinarily lovely to look at, smartly and expensively dressed, sophisticated, and cultivated.

"I want to thank you for doing me this favor, Mr. Crowder," she said after they had both ordered shrimp salad and iced tea.

Uncle George gave her his gentle smile. "I haven't done you a favor yet, Mrs. Williams. Coming here to meet you is a favor to my old friend, Lucille."

"I'm about to place my future happiness in your hands, Mr. Crowder." Her voice was low, like soft music.

"That's a pretty big risk to take with a man you don't even know."

"Lucille knows you. That's enough for me."

"Lucille told me your problem has to do with Thomas Gorman, a man *I* don't know."

"I have to begin with an old-fashioned phrase, Mr. Crowder," Laurie Williams said, "because it's the only way to describe an old-fashioned situation." She looked away. "For the last eleven years I have been Tom Gorman's mistress."

"Mistress is a term that belongs in a Fannie Hurst novel," Uncle George said. *"Back Street,* I think it was called. It was meant to imply what was called a 'kept woman'."

"That's been my position for eleven years, Mr. Crowder. I live in an apartment supplied by Tom. The clothes I wear, the food I eat, the car I drive, my jewelry is all supplied by Tom. I keep myself available for him at any time that he's free to be with me. When business takes him away I wait for him."

"Why?" Uncle George asked.

"Because I love him," Laurie Williams said.

Uncle George pushed aside the dish in front of him as though he'd lost his appetite. "The stories in the press indicate that he lives with his wife of twenty years and their two children. He keeps you for his pleasure on the side?"

"He keeps me because *he* loves *me,"* the woman said, adding, "If there's anything Tom cares more about than me it's his work. He's involved in the invention and production of modern weapons of war, the most sophisticated of nuclear missiles—which could mean the survival of our country. His work is financed by his father-in-law. Willard Sayles Incorporated supplies him with the money, the laboratories, and the skilled help he needs. If he were to walk out on his wife, Willard Sayles' daughter, the old man would put an end

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to his work, destroy him. And so I must remain his secret, a bitter secret because we both want to be open about it."

"I'm sorry," Uncle George said, "but I'm not equipped to advise you about a problem of this sort."

"Bear with me while I tell you about the last couple of months," Laurie Williams said, touching his sleeve.

"Back in April Tom had to go to the Middle East to consult with nuclear experts in Israel. He was gone a couple of weeks. Every day he was out there he phoned me. The last time I talked with him was the night before he was due to fly home. Hours later it happened—the plane crash. I had to watch it on television, read about it in the papers, hear it on the radio. I couldn't go to the hospital to see him. I couldn't call him on the telephone and he couldn't call me, surrounded by Willard Sayles' doctors and by his wife and children who made a great public show of being close to him. It was hell, Mr. Crowder."

"I can imagine."

"Then, after an agonizing two months of silence, I read that Tom was being brought up to Mr. Sayles' place in Lakeview. The story was that Tom was going to live by himself in a hunting lodge belonging to Sayles. I saw television pictures of him driving around in a car by himself, his face covered by that hood. I heard an interview he gave TV reporters saying he didn't want his wife and children to see what had happened until he knew the outcome of the plastic surgery. —But he was free, moving around by himself, unwatched, Mr. Crowder! There was no reason on earth why he couldn't get to a phone and call me. But he didn't, he hasn't!"

"Small town, afraid of gossip?" Uncle George suggested.

"Please, Mr. Crowder! For eleven years—until this accident—there wasn't a day Tom didn't call me if he wasn't able to see me. There must be hundreds of pay-phones from which he could call me without starting any gossip or creating any suspicions in Willard Sayles' mind, or his wife's. There are dozens of people connected with his job he'd have reason to phone. Making a phone call from a public place wouldn't reveal the fact that he had a woman stashed away."

"You want me to search him out on one of his walks and ask him why he hasn't phoned you?" Uncle George asked.

Laurie Williams reached out and her fingers closed on Uncle George's wrist. "I want you to find out if the man walking around Lakeview Mountain with a ski mask over his face is really Tom Gorman."

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"But his wife and children, the press, the doctors who care for him—"

"Tom's work involves political and military contacts of the most secret kind. He was returning from an area where political intrigue and violence is the name of the game. Tom could have heard something out there that someone must suppress."

"But Willard Sayles and his family must have seen him when they visited him in the hospital. He's staying at Sayles' lodge—"

"I'm talking about love, Mr. Crowder," Laurie Williams interrupted. "For eleven years Tom and I have shared our deepest thoughts and dreams. Nothing in the world would prevent his getting in touch with me when he could. If it *is* Tom who is walking around Lakeview wearing that ski mask, driving around the countryside in his car, he's had two weeks in which there would have been no problem at all for him to get in touch with me."

"Perhaps he's had time to think about his relationship with you and decided to end it," Uncle George ventured.

"I've thought of that and I can't accept it," Laurie Williams said. "Oh, he might have decided to change things, that *is* possible, but he would never make that decision without telling me, frankly, how things were. Mr. Crowder, I don't believe the man in the ski mask is Tom. And if he isn't, then Tom is in some terrible danger, possibly even dead—murdered!" Her voice broke.

"Willard Sayles has installed this man in his lodge on the mountain," Uncle George said. "*He* would have to know the truth. Are you suggesting that he—?"

"Money and power are all that matter to Willard Sayles," Laurie Williams said. "If Tom discovered that Willard Sayles Incorporated was selling weapons and technology to enemies of our country Sayles wouldn't hesitate to eliminate him!"

"That's pretty wild talk," Uncle George said.

"But if the man in the ski mask *isn't* Tom, set up to convince the public that Tom is alive and well, would you think it was so wild?"

Uncle George was silent for a moment. "Do you have a picture of Tom Gorman?"

The woman reached for her purse and opened it. She produced a snapshot of a dark, good-looking man. "If the plastic surgery was as extensive as the Sayles family have led us to believe it was, this could be meaningless." Her voice trembled.

"I don't promise anything, Ms. Williams," Uncle George said, "but I'll give it a whirl. How do I reach you?"

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She scribbled a number on the page of a small notebook, tore out the page, and handed it to Uncle George. "This is my home phone in New York," she said. "I'm going back there—just in case my fears are wrong and Tom should call. It's the only place he would try to reach me."

Willard Sayles' mountain lodge was only a little more than a mile away from Uncle George's log cabin, where he lived alone with Timmy, his black-and-white setter. The two houses were separated by a high ridge of land, each approached by different old logging roads.

Uncle George had seen his hooded neighbor just once in town, but he was aware of the man's comings and goings. Perhaps there was some sort of high-pitched sound to Thomas Gorman's car that only Timmy could hear, like a silent dog whistle, but the setter would wake from a sound sleep, raise his head, and listen. It wasn't the same reaction he had when someone started up Uncle George's logging road from the main highway. On those occasions he would bark, alerting Uncle George to the fact that visitors were on the way. In the case of the comings and goings from the Sayles lodge, Timmy was obviously aware, but it was none of his business so he sounded no warning.

On his way back from his luncheon with Laurie Williams in his Jeep, Uncle George caught sight of the man in the hood, the man who might or might not be Thomas Gorman, coming out of the supermarket carrying two large paper shopping bags. The man had evidently been replenishing his supplies. Uncle George kept straight on down the highway, turning off at his own logging road.

Timmy greeted him with delight. Uncle George sat on the deck of the cabin and rubbed the dog's ears. Perhaps ten minutes passed, then the dog tensed and pulled his head away to listen. Uncle George guessed that the hooded man was on the way up his side of the ridge, taking his groceries to the Sayles lodge.

Getting up and walking into the cabin, Uncle George took down the rifle that hung over the fireplace. Timmy bounded about, his tail thrashing. "No way to tell you, boy," Uncle George said, "but this time it isn't going to be rabbits or squirrels."

Timmy seemed a little puzzled by the fact that Uncle George didn't go toward any of their special hunting places. Instead, the man climbed up the ridge through the heavy growth of pine trees. The

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setter darted off in the direction of the rabbit warrens and looked back, his tail wagging. When Uncle George didn't respond, he retraced his steps and, a few yards farther on, he veered off in another direction, suggesting that there was good hunting there. Uncle George ignored him and kept walking to the top of the ridge. There he stopped. Looking down the other side he could see the Sayles lodge at the foot of the decline. The hooded man was carrying his market bags in from his parked car.

"Heel!" Uncle George said to Timmy. The setter came in close and sat down at his side. Then Uncle George started down to the lodge, Timmy close enough beside him to be touched.

In the clearing outside the lodge was a huge old oak tree. Uncle George, his eyes on the lodge, sat down in the grass with his back to the tree.

"Down," he said to Timmy, who obediently lay a few feet away, his tail wagging expectantly, waiting for the word that he could roam. It didn't come. Uncle George took a pipe from his pocket, filled it from a plastic pouch, and lit it. He never took his eyes off the lodge.

Half an hour passed and then the door of the lodge opened and the hooded man reappeared. He came straight toward the oak tree where Uncle George sat.

"Guard, Timmy," Uncle George said in a quiet voice. The dog seemed to grow tense, watching the hooded man approach.

The man's voice was muffled by the brown woolen mask when he spoke. "You planning to camp out here, buster?"

"I didn't want to intrude on your privacy," Uncle George said. "But I have a message for you. Laurie wants you to call."

"Laurie who?" the muffled voice asked.

Uncle George reached down for his rifle, which he put on the grass beside him. It wasn't a quick movement. "Extraordinary thing about your hands," he said. "So terribly burned everywhere else but not a mark on your hands."

"I'm asking you nicely, buster, find some other parking space. This is private property."

"Glad to get going," Uncle George said, not moving, "if you'll tell me Laurie's last name."

"What the hell does this lady's last name got to do with anything?"

"If you knew this lady's last name you just may be Thomas Gorman," Uncle George said quietly.

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"Of course I'm Thomas Gorman!" The muffled voice was suddenly loud.

"So tell me Laurie's last name."

"What if I tell you to drop dead?"

"Why, then I'll make a citizen's arrest," Uncle George said.

"On what charge?"

"Criminal impersonation," Uncle George said blandly, hoping it sounded like something real. It evidently did, because suddenly he was looking down the barrel of an impressive-looking handgun.

"You crazy old bastard," the hooded man said. "You really couldn't mind your own business, could you? So get up on your feet! I'm going to move you out of sight until I get instructions on how to deal with you. Up! And leave that rifle of yours where it is!"

Uncle George drew in his legs and pushed himself up slowly, back to the tree. "Attack," he said in a quiet conversational tone.

A black-and-white streak shot through the air and the man in the hood screamed as Timmy's powerful jaws closed on his wrist, the handgun dropping from his suddenly paralyzed hand. He tried to shake himself free, flailing at the setter with his free hand. Uncle George kicked the handgun out of reach.

"Enough, Timmy," he said.

The dog let go of the hooded man's wrist and backed off, still at the ready. As the man, down on his knees, lifted the bottom edge of his mask so he could suck at his bleeding wrist Uncle George reached out and snatched it off his head—revealing a blond man in his early thirties with pale-blue eyes, blazing with anger.

"Remarkable," Uncle George said. "Not a surgical scar anywhere, and you look no more like Thomas Gorman than the man in the moon."

The man's mouth twisted into a sneer. "What next?" he asked.

"We're going to walk into town," Uncle George said. "I wouldn't risk riding in a car with you as a passenger or a driver. And just so you won't think I'm too senile to handle you—you see that pear tree over there, the pear on the top limb?"

Uncle George raised his rifle, squinted along the barrel, and pulled the trigger.

The pear, thirty feet away, disintegrated.

The blond man moistened his lips. "What do you want from me?"

"When we get to the sheriff's office you will be asked to tell us where Thomas Gorman is being held prisoner—or where, at worst, he's buried . . ."

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News spread like a forest fire that afternoon that Uncle George Crowder, familiar to everyone in Lakeview, was walking down the main highway into town, his setter at heel, holding his rifle at the ready on a stranger who trudged ahead of him. Before this mini-parade reached the center of town, word was out by way of a motorist who had stopped to inquire and carried a message ahead for Uncle George: the man who had been circulating in town wearing a ski mask to cover his alleged burned face was not Thomas Gorman, the national hero. Uncle George had revealed him as a fake and a fraud, made a citizen's arrest, and was bringing him into Sheriff Red Egan's office.

Red Egan and Uncle George had grown up in Lakeview as kids together and they shared a deep mutual respect. Red Egan was waiting outside his office when Uncle George arrived with his prisoner. They had accumulated a small crowd of curious townspeople in the last few hundred yards of their walk.

Egan opened his office door and the blond man, still sucking at his bleeding wrist, was taken inside.

"George?" Red said.

"A friend of mine suggested to me that the man we've thought was Thomas Gorman the last couple of weeks was not Gorman at all. I agreed to look into it and found that my friend's suspicion was correct. I placed this man under citizen's arrest and brought him in."

"What happened to his wrist?"

"Timmy," Uncle George said, rubbing the setter's head. Timmy had been allowed in. Red's office was a familiar place to him.

Red Egan showed surprise. "Timmy bit him?"

"On command," Uncle George said. From his pocket he took the 9-millimeter pistol the man had drawn on him. "He tried this on me and I told Timmy I needed help."

Egan turned to the prisoner. "Who are you?"

The blond man gave him a tight-lipped smile.

"It doesn't matter so much who he is," Uncle George said. "What matters is Thomas Gorman. Where is he—is he alive or dead?"

"Who's your friend who suspected him?" Red asked Uncle George.

"Off the record for the moment," Uncle George said. It was not up to him to reveal Laurie Williams' secret. "As I remember, Willard Sayles and his daughter, Gorman's wife, identified the hooded man we'd been seeing around town as Gorman. They were both present

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when the TV and radio people and the press photographers came here to interview this alleged Thomas Gorman."

Red Egan nodded. "They wanted it open, but over and done with. 'I want my husband to be left in peace,' his wife said."

"So I suggest we take this character with us and go out to Willard Sayles' place and ask the old man and Gorman's wife what the score is," Uncle George said.

Red Egan opened the drawer of his desk and produced a pair of handcuffs. "Put your hands behind your back," he ordered the blond man. "And when I get these locked on you I suggest you don't tug at them. Your wrist is going to be sore enough as it is."

The Sayles mansion stood on a rise of ground overlooking the lake. It wasn't an old house, but the architecture was old Colonial. There was an eight-foot-high stone wall surrounding the grounds—though Sayles owned several hundred acres of land outside that enclosure. To enter you had to go through an entrance in the wall, presided over by a gate house. The locks on the gate were electronically controlled from inside. If the iron gates were closed, there was no way in without attracting someone's attention.

Uncle George, Red Egan, and their manacled passenger had no trouble attracting attention when they drove out to the closed iron gate. Just inside the gate a man in work clothes sat in an old canvas deck-chair, a battered hat tilted forward to shield his eyes from the afternoon sun. He was a local man, known to both Uncle George and the sheriff.

"Hi, Red. Hi, Uncle George," the man said. His name was Gyp Denby. He looked curiously at the blond man whose hands were manacled behind his back.

"Open up, Gyp," Egan said.

"Got to call the house and get permission," Gyp said. "Cost me my job if I don't." He turned toward the gate house.

"Hold it, Gyp," Egan said. "This is official business."

"The big man will fire me if I don't tell him we've got visitors," Gyp said.

"Seems like you stand to lose your job either way," Red Egan said. "Sayles'll fire you if you don't call him and you won't have a job if you do—I'd have to arrest you for obstructing justice."

"Well—" Gyp said. He reached inside the gate-house door for a hidden switch and the iron gate swung open, as noiseless as if it was

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anchored in butter. "You tell him I had no choice," Gyp called out as Red Egan drove on through the gate.

"You bet, Gyp." Red glanced up into the rearview mirror. "Probably call the minute we make the turn up ahead."

"Won't give Sayles time enough for much," Uncle George said.

"Much what?" Red asked.

Uncle George's mouth was a grim line. "Who knows?" he said.

It was a quarter of a mile of bluestone driveway before they came into full view of the house. As they started the wide circular swing toward the front door a man and a woman came out of the house and waited for the car to pull up. Uncle George knew them both by sight. The vigorous-looking grey-haired man in his late sixties was Willard Sayles. The dark-haired woman was his daughter Dorothy, Thomas Gorman's wife.

"Gyp seen his duty and he done it," Red Egan muttered. He stopped the car. Uncle George got out the passenger side and held his rifle at the ready as Red pulled the formerly masked man out of the back seat.

"What's this all about, sheriff?" Sayles asked. His smile was wide, but it was artificial and without warmth.

"You know this man?" Red asked, indicating his prisoner.

Sayles gave the blond man a steady look. "I never saw him before in my life," Sayles said.

"You, Mrs. Gorman?"

She was handsome, but cold as her father, thought Uncle George.

"I don't know who he is," Dorothy Gorman said.

"You know Mr. Crowder?" Red asked.

Sayles and his daughter both nodded. "We know who he is," Sayles said. He gave Uncle George that cold smile. "You're something of a legend around the village, Mr. Crowder." He turned back to Red. "Why did you think we would know your prisoner, sheriff?"

"Because he's been living up in your lodge, wearing a hood over his head and face, posing as your son-in-law, in public. You could say Mr. Crowder unmasked him. He won't talk, so we brought him here, hoping you could explain him."

"But Tom is living at the lodge!" Mrs. Gorman said.

"This man's been sitting in for him," Red Egan said. "Can you tell us where Mr. Gorman really is?"

"I supposed he was at the lodge," Sayles said. "He's been charging supplies to my account at the store."

"But not communicating with you?" Red asked.

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"It was understood he wouldn't unless he had some problem," Dorothy Gorman said. "He wanted to be alone."

"If you could see what happened to the poor devil's face—" Sayles began.

"Extraordinary," Uncle George said quietly, "but I could swear I just saw someone trying to signal us from that upstairs window."

Both Sayles and his daughter spun around as if they had been jolted by an electric prod.

"I think I'd like to go in and have a look," Uncle George said, turning toward the front door.

Sayles blocked his way. "You can't go into my house without my permission, Crowder, and without a search warrant!"

"You can have me arrested—afterward," Uncle George said. He gave a sharp shove with his shoulder and Sayles staggered back.

"You'll go to jail for the rest of your life, you crazy old coot!" Sayles shouted.

"One of us will go to jail—but not till after I look," said Uncle George.

"There are armed men in the house," Sayles said. "If I tell them you came in without my permission you've had it!"

"Then you'll lead the way—" Uncle George raised his rifle so that it rested on Sayles' back, "—and I promise you if there's any shooting you'll get caught in the crossfire."

"Sheriff, stop him! You're the law!"

Red Egan looked stone-faced. He didn't move. "He's armed, I'm not, Sayles."

"March," Uncle George said.

It was a strange search. Room after room on the first floor, Sayles leading the way, Uncle George right behind him with his rifle at Sayles' back, Red Egan bringing up the rear. It was notable that Dorothy Gorman didn't run for a telephone or scream for help. She had dropped down in a chair in the living room and sat like someone frozen.

There was nothing but a well ordered, luxurious home on the main floor. No servants visible. The parade went up to the second floor. There was one empty room after another until they came to the end of a wide hall—there they were confronted by a locked door.

"Open it," Uncle George ordered.

Sayles didn't move.

"Mr. Gorman!" Uncle George shouted.

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There was a muffled cry from inside the room.

Uncle George prodded Sayles in the back with his gun. "Open it, Sayles. And tell them it's you, or, like I promised, you'll be caught in the middle."

"It's me! Sayles!" the grey-haired man shouted at the door. "Don't shoot!" He reached in his pocket and produced a key. Uncle George reached past him, turned the knob, and pushed Sayles into the room ahead of him.

Two men stood ready for action, but not ready enough. Red Egan, it turned out, was armed—with his prisoner's nine-millimeter pistol. A third man with a scarred face sat on the bed, his hands tied to the headpost, a wide piece of adhesive tape strapped across his mouth.

Red Egan disarmed the guards. Uncle George sat down on the edge of the bed beside the scarred man.

"This is going to hurt," he said. He reached out, took a corner of the adhesive tape, and gave it a sharp yank off the man's mouth. "Are you Tom Gorman?"

The man nodded, covering his mouth with a scarred hand. Uncle George untied the clothesline rope that tied Gorman's hands to the bedpost.

"How did you find me?" Gorman asked, his voice hoarse.

"A friend of yours asked me to check," Uncle George said.

"Laurie?" Gorman asked.

"It's her secret and yours," Uncle George said.

"Not any more!" Gorman cried out, a suddenly joyful man. "Can you take me to a telephone?"

"I don't think you can reach her yet," Uncle George said. "She's on her way there—from here—to wait and hope."

While Gorman was waiting for an answer to his repeated phone calls from Red Egan's office, Uncle George and the sheriff got part of the story. After the plane crash, Gorman, critically burned, was in a delirium and had talked in fragments about what he'd discovered on his trip to the Middle East. Willard Sayles Incorporated had been selling arms and secret nuclear techniques to the enemy. But how much did Gorman know and to whom had he talked?

"They could have killed me," he said, "but it was essential for them to find out if I had talked to anyone in the State Department, the CIA, or the Pentagon. They brought me to Sayles' house, set up that phony in the woods, and made a big public show of it so that none of my friends or associates would ask questions." He held out

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his hands. "You see these fresh burns? They're not from the crash. The bastards burned me with cigarettes. They fed me stuff that nauseated me, made me vomit. I knew my only hope was not to talk, no matter what they put me through."

"And had you talked to someone?"

"I didn't have the chance. The plane crashed before I could get to anyone."

The phone on Red Egan's desk rang and he answered. "We've got your call through to New York," the operator told him. Egan handed the phone to Gorman.

"Laurie?" the man cried out. "Oh, my darling! Yes, I'm safe, thanks to you and Mr. Crowder. No, darling, no more secrets. I'll get to you as soon as the authorities let me go. They've got Sayles at last. Laurie dear, listen. I've been a fool for far too long. I—" He looked at Red Egan, who beckoned to Uncle George and the two men went out into the hall and shut the door.

"Happy ending," Uncle George said.

Red Egan gave his friend a puzzled look. "I've been thinking, George. That room in the house where we found Gorman—it was on the lake side, without a window that looked out onto where we were standing when you said you saw someone signaling."

Uncle George smiled. "I chopped down the cherry tree," he said.

"How's that?"

"Like George Washington, I cannot tell a lie. But I had to find some way to justify going into that house. Sayles and his daughter panicked instead of stonewalling it, so I knew I was on the right track."

Red Egan laughed. "George, have you ever tried selling anyone the Brooklyn Bridge? I think you could, by Judas!"

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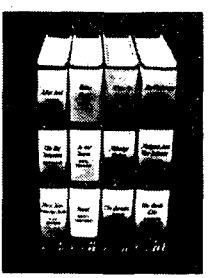

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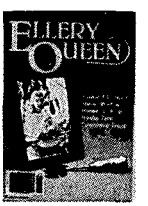


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